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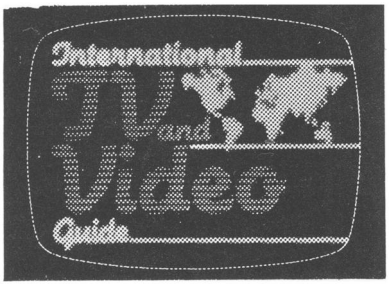

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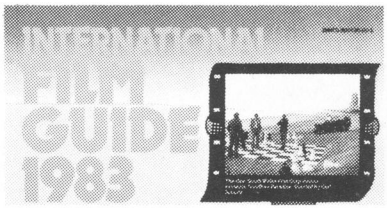

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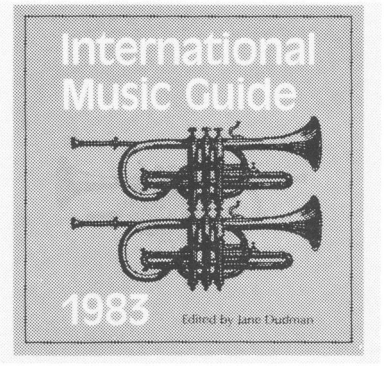

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FILM QUARTERLY IN THE CLASSROOM

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PETER BRUNETTE

Vittorio Taviani: An Interview

This interview was recorded in June, 1982 in the small piazza of San Pietro in Montorio, situated near the top of the Gianiculum Hill in Rome. Bramante's masterpiece of Renaissance architecture, known as the "Tempietto," stood a few dozen yards distant. The occasion for the interview was the imminent release of the Taviani brothers' latest film, *La Notte di San Lorenzo* (*The Night of Shooting Stars*), which had just won the Special Jury Prize at Cannes. The film is a moving, largely autobiographical portrayal of the attempt of a small group of Italian villagers, caught in 1944 between the advancing Americans and the retreating Germans, to escape to the American lines.

The Tavianis, now nearly fifty, have been making films for twenty years, but are known in the United States chiefly for *Padre Padrone* (1977), an adaptation of Gavino Ledda's best-selling account of his passage from ignorant Sardinian shepherd to university professor. Their most recent film to be released in the US, *Il Prato* (*The Meadow,* 1979), stars Isabella Rossellini; its whimsical combination of love triangle and myth did not sit well with New York critics and the film quickly disappeared. What are perhaps their best films are barely known in this country, but with their visibility greatly increased by the success of *Padre Padrone,* this situation seems about to change.

The films that are destined to have the biggest impact, once they reach a wider audience, are their first, *Un Uomo da Bruciare* (*A Man for Burning,* 1962), which stars Gian Maria Volonte as a reluctant Sicilian revolutionary, a complicated mythical allegory called *Sotto il Segno dello Scorpione* (*Under the Sign of Scorpio,* 1968), *San Michele Aveva un Gallo* (*Saint Michael Had a Rooster,* 1971), and the brilliant *Allonsanfan* (1973–4), starring Marcello Mastroianni as another less-than-eager

The brothers Vittorio and Paolo Taviani directing a scene in NIGHT OF THE SHOOTING STARS

revolutionary, this time set just after the French revolution.

I recently saw your new film, La Notte di San Lorenzo, *and I liked it a great deal. But hasn't the subject of the war and the resistance been rather overdone?*

Our film is not really about 1944 or Fascism or the Resistance. No, this film is about a feeling, a need Paolo and I feel, which is very contemporary, to try to find in the collective imagination those stories in which man, today divided, disheartened, without plans and tremendously afraid, those stories in which man reappears in the completeness of his potential. It is precisely this need that we have to fulfill in order to understand our era of the "years of lead." And therefore we have to rethink these stories of the times in which we've lived, but *not* out of a nostalgia for the past, nor to do a simple chronicle of the past, but to recount to ourselves, at the level of the collective imagination, those stories in which all the potentialities of human nature are exalted. Over the last twenty years that we've been making films, we've often asked ourselves why don't we make a film on that period of our lives forty years ago? And we've always said no, because there were all those films that we loved, in fact, the films that opened the cinema to us, the films of Rossellini and the other neorealists, and so it seemed useless at that moment. And now, forty years later, we feel that we have done something completely different from what Roberto did. We don't think we've simply recounted the facts of that period, but rather the facts of that period transformed by the popular imagination. This is fundamental for us. In addition to our own memories, we picked up stories while traveling in Tuscany. We had seen many of these things ourselves. But in the protagonists and in the survivors themselves, everything has been transformed into myths, legends, *chansons de geste,* in which everything is both true and false, invented, at the same time. And invented in a direction typical of the popular imagination: when it invents its myths, it always invents from a base of actual historical truth and sometimes in its own interest. And then the specific invention always takes the form of whatever the needs of the moment are in which one tells the story. Therefore the film for us is the most contemporary film that one could possibly make. I don't say that the actual history is a pretext, because history never is; rather, history is the concretization of these needs of today.

And another thing—as soon as you start talking about partisans and the resistance you immediately fall into an error because you can make linguistic signs and labels, yes, but which might be mistaken and even be a refusal of sorts. What are these "partisans" in our film? They're really peasants. They are trying to gather their grain and to protect it, because they need it to get through the winter which they know will come, and in order to defend it, they shoot at those who try to take it away. So the war of the partisans is reduced to its most basic meaning—the primitive level of man faced with absolute choices, struggling to survive.

What I also liked is that the subject of the film is storytelling itself. For example, the way the film begins and ends with the same image of the stylized window and of the mother telling the whole story to her child.

Yes. For us, any movement toward naturalism or neorealism, even on the narrative level, was impossible. All the inventions were born linguistically. For example, the story is told through the eyes of the little girl. This already gave us the possibility of a point of view of the image that was different. So, going after our own past and our own memories and that which was told to us by others, we noticed that strange things were being born. For example, the appearance of the ancient Greek soldiers—I don't know any longer whether this came from us or from somebody else—was born from a metaphor. The whole film moves continuously from the metaphor to the fable. In terms of film language, this mode of storytelling would keep us from doing anything resembling cinéma vérité or realism. Instead we wanted to tell these fables through these grand tableaux which are a little like murals—the experiences that we had much earlier with our first encounter with spectacle (which was not the movies, but the operas of Verdi and the great melodramas of the nineteenth century, especially at the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino that our father used to take us to when school was out). Well, for us it seemed that everything possible happened on

that stage, and in a way that was completely different than we could ever imagine. Thus, a certain "angulation" has remained in our style, as though you were looking at an enormous stage on the screen. Because we are making a *fictional* cinema; with reality as the point of departure, we make fiction films in which the things that are represented are clearly and openly *represented.* We don't want to fake reality. We say clearly what is history, what is fable, what is myth.

In fact, the film reminds me of those stories of Italo Calvino in which something fabulous springs up out of the middle of something totally realistic. Also the South American writer Gabriel Maria Marques.

Certainly. Marques's stories are also typical of a certain culture which is similar to our Italian culture, or the Russian, in any case a culture which has its roots in the countryside. We feel much closer to the great stories of nineteenth-century Russia than to the French tradition which is more provincial or more about cities. For us, it's still possible to find myth in this tradition which has its roots in the countryside. But this doesn't mean to go backwards in terms of a problematic or a feeling. No. This is the stage on which the contradictions of our time, of men who are living in modern times, are made concrete in terms of this imagination which links them also with the past of the peasant.

There are also striking images which reappear in your films. For example, the dramatic visual separation of groups, which is often highly stylized. It was constant in Sotto il Segno dello Scorpione. *I also noticed it in* Allonsanfan, *and here it is again in the cantina of* The Night of Shooting Stars.

You're right. And by the way, you'll notice that the cantina was very purposely chosen, because it's a setting based on truth—it was done in a Medici villa—but it also recalls the conventions of melodrama. The problem for us is if this memory of melodramatic spectacle doesn't become cinema. Because for me filmed plays are horrible. The spectacle has to transform itself into images that are uniquely cinematic. This is what we did in *San Michele Aveva un Gallo,* perhaps our best film. We begin with a series of very long shots in a piazza, but break it up with extreme close-ups. This was done continually, specifically to avoid the danger of theatricalization, since the close-up is uniquely cinematic.

I recently saw your first film, Un Uomo da Bruciare. *I must say that the films you are making today seem to me less daring from a technical or formal point of view than the older ones.*

Well, each stage of someone's life has its special characteristics, and you can't say youth is better than maturity, or vice versa. Likewise, it's stupid to say that only when you're young are you strong. I think that *The Night of Shooting Stars* is actually the most powerful film we've ever made. Getting older, we've reached a certain vision of the world which implies an experience of the world. It's related to that *pietas* of Virgil [the personification of the sense of duty towards God, man, and the fatherland], which was taken up by the Fascists, and thus condemned. Later it was seen in more subjective terms as concerning relations with other men.

Then we lived through a period . . . well, we were born with a love for neorealism. But when we started making films we realized that neorealism was becoming naturalism, petty bourgeois sketches, and romantic populism, and we saw that our great love was being betrayed. So we began to feel a need, which became concrete in *Un Uomo da Bruciare,* to do different things from the point of view of substance and style. In this film we felt the need to mix the great neorealist tradition with the enormous tradition which came from the great line of classical works of art, and which, according to us, went from Homer to Shakespeare, Verdi, and Tolstoy. When we made *Un Uomo da Bruciare,* we said, sure, we are telling stories of peasants, we are going to Sicily to tell these stories, and so we're the sons of neorealism. But, for us, Salvatore, the protagonist of the film, is closer to Shakespeare's Coriolanus than to any of the neorealist characters. He's ambiguous, this Coriolanus, in this extraordinary work, and he frightens everybody because nobody knows who he is. His defects and his merits are also those of our protagonist Salvatore and they lead us to Shakespeare's ambiguity. So because of this need, this film can seem more daring.

Later on came 1968. Even *Sotto il Segno dello Scorpione,* which was made in 1966,

shows some of these preoccupations. This was a period—according to us great, and very fruitful—when a different relationship was required with the medium, style, and consequently with the public. A relationship of *aggressivity,* both in terms of style and the spectators. To make films was really to slap people in the face. To take everything that was one's stylistic heritage and smash it to see what would happen. This also corresponded to the general feeling. If you think about it, in those years, not only us in *Sotto il Segno,* but also Bertolucci, and Bergman, that great storyteller (yet basically so very simple), began making complicated films like *Persona,* an incredibly difficult film. Buñuel also. In any case, all these film-makers, Godard and the other innovators, both young and old, felt the need to break everything up. So, this was another reason our films of that time are more "daring," because one has the need to be creative in terms of one's own specific time period.

Then, 1968 went by, and we began to see certain themes appearing in Italy—a unification, incomplete of course, but interesting—themes of life and politics, but also themes about personal lives which were common to young people from both the north and the south. For once, the two regions of Italy weren't divided. Instead, the great gust of wind of 1968 caused the young people of both regions to share the same themes. This cultural unification had never occurred before in Italy, never since the time of the failed Risorgimento —with the brief exception of the period after World War II. And then there was an increase in the number of people who could read, and this also creates common points of view. And, of course, television. I remember when we were filming *Un Uomo da Bruciare,* we went into a village, and they didn't even know who Visconti was—or even Vittorio Gassman. For them, the screen was something magical. When we returned years later, after television, we all had at bottom the same interests and the same information. Now television has created, is creating, a collective imagination. So the relationship becomes one of *complicity,* with the spectator, with the style, because you feel at base that you are close to expressing something that is part of your theme and also belongs to this great collective imagination.

NIGHT OF THE SHOOTING STARS

And from this comes the necessity, conscious or unconscious, that your style, even staying the same—whether it's realistic or fabulous —that you achieve the maximum of *transparency.* That is, the capacity for being read. So, it's not a matter of audacity, but rather a maturity which carries one to an enormous simplicity of style. Not a simplification of style, not that style loses all its difficulty. But you try to achieve it by means of simplicity because you realize that today achieving a relationship with others is much more possible. So there's an understanding, whereas in '68 it was necessary to attack. Then we were saying that there's this public that doesn't understand anything, that goes to bad films, that reads bad comics. We're different, so let's fight. And now we say: let's discuss it. Why are we fighting? And then, little by little—it's not that we've arrived at a marvelous collective imagination, or a marvelous public—no. But this process was born. Thus, according to us, our style, even though remaining the same, now seeks this transparency, this legibility, because it was born from this need for contact. Who knows? History is so full of the unfore-

seen—tomorrow it may be necessary to start fighting again.

I see what you mean. You certainly can't say that Sotto il Segno *is a transparent film!*

Right, but we still like the film very much. That aggressivity is there, but still expressed in a classic style. Some people were throwing everything away in an anarchic and confusion-making way in 1968. For us, however, even though we also felt the need to break with the past, this breaking expressed itself in a classical cadenza, something that we have never abandoned. No, anarchy and romantic improvisation are not part of our work. We very much like Goethe, for example. We want there to be the maximum violence inside, but to make it all concrete in images and stylistic structures which are the most classical possible. Thus, *Sotto il Segno* is a film of breaking, but everything is maintained under a classical style.

There also seems to be recurring themes in your work. For example, the presence of myth and ritual—the way the groups dance in Sotto il Segno, *and* Allonsanfan.

Yes, and also in *Il Prato,* when they dance on the piazza. Unfortunately, we keep doing the same thing over and over! (Laughter) No, each author has his own specific identity. For every film, Paolo and I always say we're going to make a completely different film from all the others. But then, at the end, after a year or two . . . it's really the same discourse, with variations. The variations come from your own personal life and from the changes that history brings. And this is great, because otherwise it would be very boring.

I remember when we first came to Rome from Tuscany to make films. Naturally, it was impossible to become directors right away, and we didn't want to just stand around doing nothing, so we wrote a play while we were trying to break into film-making every way possible. Well, this period lasted two years, and so we put *everything* into this play (which was very close to a film), and which ended up becoming an opera, actually. When we were finished, we said, "Oh God! What can we do now? We've already used up all our ideas!" (Laughter) Of course, we didn't know then that life continually changes all around you, as well as your own personal life.

Would you say that the influence of neorealism has been a help or a hindrance in your work?

Well, our relations with neorealism are like those between sons and their father. A very well-loved father, but at a certain point, like all well-loved fathers, the son *must* bury him. If the father is not buried, the son will never manage to do anything. When you bury him, it can also be violent, but if he's a well-loved father, you can love the memory. Thus, you're different from him, but the memory remains.

The Night of Shooting Stars, which seems to us at the opposite pole from neorealism and from those films done by Rossellini, say, in spite of its theme—nevertheless, the memory of this father is there.

This memory is also clearly present in Ermanno Olmi's The Tree of the Wooden Clogs.

Certainly. I like that film very much. I really think that neorealism is the matrix of all us Italians. But not only Italians—also Scorsese, and Altman at certain times, and Coppola, basically, no? Even Antonioni. You sense that he was creatively born during that period, and thus the achievements of neorealism belong also to him. Even if he's always tried to be different. Also Fellini. But every author has his own physiognomy.

What are the specific problems about being a film-maker in Italy?

Well, you know that here in Italy it's always a drama, a tragedy. (Laughter) When we first got here from Tuscany to make films—you had to come to Rome to make films—we got here around 1954 or 1955. And really, it seems a bit romantic, but the difficulties were so terribly great—there were only *two* films in production at the time—that we said to ourselves, "Cinema or death!" That's a little juvenile, and a little romantic, but we gave ourselves five years. We would do everything possible to break into film-making, and if we didn't succeed in five years, we would kill ourselves.

It's still very difficult, especially for young people, but what has really changed things is television. Television has 20 hours of programming to fill up every day. Who's going to do it? So there's a demand. Most of the young assistant directors that we found around Italy while making our films have followed us to Rome and have been able to try themselves out, especially doing television.

We have an extremely negative industrial structure here in Italy. What we lack is a real industry. A *serious* film industry. What does any serious industry do? Well, they all create products, also for profit, but most companies also have a department where they experiment with new possibilities for these products. This is insurance for the future—new talent, new solutions—which simply doesn't exist here. If a film comes out and is accidentally successful, they keep making films just like it until the public gets tired of them, and then they start all over again. We've been waiting for years for the legislature to make a new law on the cinema, in which the cinema is also considered a public service, in other words, that the community has a *right* to film. We simply can't allow it to remain in the hands of private capital which has demonstrated itself incapable of properly managing it. Of course, we need private capital—it's a capitalist country. But it's important to make it so that the cinema does not only serve the interests of profit, and that the state intervenes whenever there isn't enough room for film-makers. In France, they're now discussing something with Mitterand and Jack Lang [the French minister of culture], a law whose purpose will be to guarantee that there's room also for those who make films which don't get a favorable response right away.

We now have in Italy a series of "Pierini" films—you know, jokes—which aren't bad. If you want to see one, fine. But if these films saturate the market, and keep others from making non-Pierini films, that's not good. Therefore, a law in which the state also has its part to play in the industry, and most importantly, as in Germany, where the relationship between film and television is regularized. These two forces must not fight with one another, but must become accomplices. This isn't important for us only on the economic level. Even creatively this would be important because if you knew that your film, no matter how difficult, which wouldn't even normally be made, but thanks to the small screen, would still be seen by millions of people—this is a great help, conscious or unconscious, to finding solutions which may be daring, or difficult, but which aren't just cerebral, that is, really eccentric. Still a risk—with the maximum daring, but also with the maximum responsibility. In this way if the relationship between TV and film were regularized, somebody starting in film today would be sure of eventually finding his own way. Today, it's really agony. The young directors nowadays just don't know what to do or where to start.

This is also true of the actors, where it's even worse. I don't know why. There're no schools in Italy, and good actors do something really fine and then just disappear. Producers only look for actors who've been financially successful in the past. In other countries, I think, if an actor is good, he's pretty much guaranteed to find work. But not in Italy.

This question of television is immensely important. In America, of course, this sort of support doesn't really exist at all. It's impossible to think of something like Orchestra Rehearsal *or* Padre Padrone *being made for television in America.*

In fact, the television network was also involved, fifty-fifty, in the financing of *The Night of Shooting Stars.* And Olmi's *Tree of the Wooden Clogs* was completely financed by television. Do you realize? And even Bertolucci's film *The Spider's Stratagem.* And our film, *San Michele Aveva un Gallo. Il Prato* was also made for television. Almost all of our work has been linked in some way or another with television. And Glauber Rocha made a film for Italian television. And Antonioni's most recent film. It's all because here in Italy television started off so poorly because it was so closely connected with the ruling Christian Democrat party when it was born. So now there's a gigantic political and cultural struggle going on to reform television, to make it more democratic. This reform was passed, and the problem is now to see if it is actually applied. But at least it exists as a base on which one can struggle and one can work.

In America, this would be unthinkable.

Well, it's both good and bad that we have state-owned television. For one thing, it's dangerous because it can become an exclusive service of the government, or it can become a public patrimony. In this difficult dialectic, you have to find the right path.

But you also have a great cinema in America which I like very much. Of course, there are a lot of dangers. The danger of the market, the danger of the difficulty of experimenting

in new styles, but along with all this is such a cinematic heritage which I think must be a great help to any young American director who is just beginning to work. To have a John Ford or a Howard Hawks behind you . . .

How is it to work with a brother? I'm sure you've heard this question many times before!

Yes, so we always respond with jokes and one-liners. But of course it's an absolutely appropriate question, because we're always astonished about it ourselves. For one thing you can put it on the rational level, and talk about brothers having the same experiences, but it's also true that in Tuscany there's a saying, "fratelli, coltelli"—"brothers, knives." So this argument doesn't really work. You can talk about it in terms of astrology: Paolo is a Scorpio, and I'm a Virgo, and our signs are complementary. You can also say that cinema is the collaborative art form *par excellence.* But none of these reasons is enough. The two of us say, only partly joking, that each of us is half neurotic, and so we make a whole neurotic between us. It was also just an accident that it happened that way, but it's an accident that we pay close attention to. More important is that our nightmares, from which our films are born, and to which our films are responses, are the same. And since so many of our reactions to sounds and images, not to mention emotions and ideas, are similar, it's obvious that it's great to be able to work together. It's just an accident that even surprises us. But don't forget that the cinema started with two brothers—the Lumières!

Perhaps this arrangement could only work in film, whose nature is so obviously collaborative to begin with.

Yes, until the moment you start shooting, the collaboration is obvious. Thus, there's no mystery about it up until that point. And mine and Paolo's sound and visual needs are the same. On a more specific level, I can tell you that when we arrive on the set we have a *very* precise script. In other words, we don't write literary scripts, but rather scripts which include all the images and sounds beforehand. So when we get there, we already know that we're going to shoot this or that face, we're going to cut here—everything in a very precise manner. But it happens sometime that you realize that you must change something for an actor, so then you have to work together on these variations before you come back to the set.

We don't divide the work up into different tasks when we arrive on the set, one sequence for one of us, one sequence for the other. Because a sequence already has its own life which cannot be by just one of us. Instead, we divide it up shot by shot. And while one of us is directing, the other stands by and keeps quiet so that the troupe does not get confused about whom to ask questions. Only the one who is directing at that moment does any talking. Then, when the shot is finished, we talk about corrections and changes and whether or not the shot went all right. Then, we move to the next shot and the other one starts directing and then only he speaks. At the beginning of the filming of *Allonsanfan,* Marcello Mastroianni was very worried about whom he was going to get direction from, who was going to be in charge. Finally, what happened was that he would just say "Hey, Paolovittorio, what should I do here?" and it worked out fine. At the end of the filming, a journalist asked Mastroianni what it was like to be directed by two people. He answered: "Oh, were there two of them?" The whole thing seems very complicated when you talk about it, but in reality it works out very simply. There's a spirit of absolute complicity. The one that works the hardest is the cameraman. Because as soon as one take is finished, the other brother is fresh and ready to start again. And the cameraman gets all upset!

Why do you think that your films aren't all that well-known in the United States?

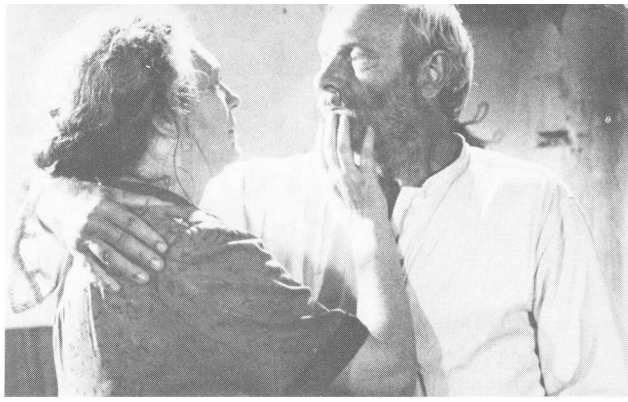
I think it's a question of distribution. In America, there's a protective policy—I'm joking—which can get really violent. I was really shocked when I went to America a few years ago and discovered that, apart from very narrow groups of intellectuals, etc., names like Pasolini weren't known at all. And I'm not talking about the masses either. And Zavattini . . . Naturally, people in America defend their own cinema very strongly, which is good, but maybe they overdo it. Besides, our films are very particular, and they have always found small audiences in past years, but weren't successful in terms of distribution. And now, with the success of *Padre Padrone,* I've found lots of intellectuals in the US who've seen *San Michele,* for example,

but in very narrowly restricted circles, naturally. *Padre Padrone,* on the other hand, seems to be known a little bit by everybody, even the doorman at the hotel, and it's well liked. We did a little tour recently on college campuses in America, and the audiences seemed to like *Allonsanfan,* and when *Il Prato* came out, the reviews seemed pretty favorable.

What's your next project?

Listen, the projects that you have before making a film—well, when the film has been made, you find that the projects have somehow moved further away. Also, this time, differently from the others, we found it really difficult to detach ourselves from this enormous caravan we call *The Night of Shooting Stars.* And besides, it's summer! And summer is beautiful in Italy, so we'll take a vacation. And then when winter comes we'll start talking about our future projects again.

I would like to thank Lynne Johnson for assistance with the transcription and translation of this interview. —P.B.



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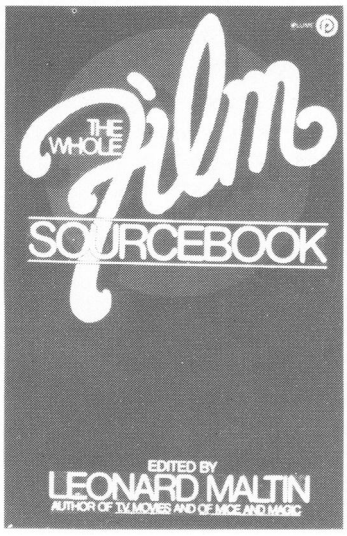

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NAL TIMES MIRROR

Concern with pornography has increasingly been a major concern of feminist thought, a concern which has recently come to a focus around the documentary Not a Love Story *by Bonnie Klein, produced for the National Film Board of Canada and widely distributed in North America. The film deals extensively with the type of pornographic imagery that depicts sadistic and violent acts against women, and it has stirred outrage at such imagery among both female and male viewers.*

However, in the wake of the film, feminists writers have begun to discuss certain difficult issues which are "structurally absent," to use the film-theory concept, from Not a Love Story. *As B. Ruby Rich noted in the* Village Voice *(see quote below), the antipornography campaign, like the pornography it attacks, has had the effect of depersonalizing sexuality and discouraging the development of a "multitude of sexual discourses . . . that people can turn to for sexual excitement instead of porn." Now Lesley Stern, in the British film-theory journal* Screen *(Nov.–Dec. 1982), has carried out a lengthy, thorough-going political analysis of the role of the anti-pornography campaign within the feminist movement; she discerns a paradoxical kind of capture of the issue by the anti-woman Right, and concludes that the tenor of the campaign has precluded analysis of what erotic pleasure in film viewing might be for female viewers. Stern's argument is far too complex to paraphrase here (*Screen *is available in many libraries and at $7.00 per copy from 29 Old Compton St., London W1V 5PL, England). But a critical element of it deals with the necessity for a distinction between sex and violence which is not always drawn in anti-pornography writing. Like Rich, Stern would like to see some concrete analysis, from both men and women, of how screen pornography and erotica actually operate.*

To analyze the functions of pornography does not, obviously, mean to endorse it. But its massive presence in contemporary society badly needs to be understood. In the following article, Scott MacDonald makes a highly personal, painfully candid beginning at this task. No doubt the article may prove shocking to some readers, as writing it was difficult for MacDonald. We welcome comments from readers, especially those wishing to carry onward responsible and objective discussion of an exceedingly emotion-laden issue. —*E.C.*

SCOTT MacDONALD

Confessions of a Feminist Porn Watcher

Finally, here's a proper subject for the legions of feminist men: let them undertake the analysis that can tell us why men like porn (not, piously, why this or that exceptional man does not*), why stroke books work, how oedipal formations feed the drive, and how any of it can be changed. Would that the film* [Not a Love Story] *had included any information from average customers, instead of stressing always the exceptional figure (Linda Lee herself, Suze Randall, etc.). And the antiporn campaigners might begin to formulate what routes could be more effective than marching outside a porn emporium.*

—B. Ruby Rich, "Anti-Porn: Soft Issue, Hard World," *Village Voice,* July 20, 1982.

Pepe Le Pew was everything I wanted to be romantically. Not only was he quite sure of himself but it never occurred to him that anything was wrong with him. I always felt that there must be great

areas of me that were repugnant to girls, and Pepe was quite the opposite of that.

—Chuck Jones, "Chuck Jones Interviewed," by Joe Adamson, *The American Animated Cartoon,* ed. Danny and Gerald Peary (New York: Dutton, 1980), 130.

For a long time I've been ambivalent about pornography. Off and on since early adolescence I've visited porn shops and theaters, grateful—albeit a little sheepishly—for their existence; and like many men, I would guess, I've often felt protective of pornography, at least in the more standard varieties.[1] (I know nothing at all about the child porn trade which, judging from news articles, is flourishing: I've never seen a child in an arcade film or videotape or in a film in a porn moviehouse; and though I've heard that many porn films involve women being tortured, I don't remember ever coming in contact with such material, except in Bonnie Klein's *Not a Love Story,* a film polemic / documentary on the nature and impact of porn films.) On the other hand, I've long felt and, in a small way, been supportive of the struggle for equality and self-determination for women; as a result, the consistent concern of feminist women about the exploitation and brutalization of the female in pornography has gnawed at my conscience. The frequent contempt of intelligent people for those who "need" pornographic materials has always functioned to keep me quiet about my real feelings, but a screening of *Not a Love Story* and a series of recent responses to it—most notably the B. Ruby Rich review quoted above—have emboldened me to assess my attitudes.

As I watched *Not a Love Story,* the film's fundamental assumption seemed very familiar: pornography is a reflection of a male-dominated culture in which women's bodies are exploited for the purpose of providing pleasure to males by dramatizing sexual fantasies which themselves imply a reconfirmation of male dominance. And while one part of my mind accepted this seemingly self-evident assumption, at a deeper level I felt resistant. The pornographic films and videotapes I've seen at theaters and in arcades *are* full of narratives in which women not only do what men want and allow men to do what they want, but effusively claim to love this particular sexual balance of power. Yet, given that males dominate in the culture, why would they pay to see sexual fantasies of male domination? Wouldn't one expect fantasy material to reveal the opposite of the status quo? Further, if going to porn films or arcades were emblematic of male power, one might expect that the experience would be characterized by an easy confidence reflective of macho security.

For me, however—and, I'm guessing, for many men who have visited porn arcades or film houses—these periodic visits are always minor traumas. While there is an erotic excitement involved in the decision to attend and in the experience itself, this is mixed with considerable amounts of fear and embarrassment. From the instant my car is carrying me toward pornography, I feel painfully visible, as if everyone who sees me knows from my expression, my body language, whatever, precisely where I'm going. The walk from the car to the door—and later, from the door to the car—is especially difficult: will someone drive by and see me? This fear of being seen has, in my case at least (as far as I can tell) less to do with guilt than with a fear of being misunderstood. Even though the frequency of my experiences with pornography has nothing at all to do with the success of my sex life—I'm at least as likely to visit a porn arcade when I'm sexually active as when I'm lonely and horny)—I always feel the power of the social stigma against such experiences. Unless the people who see me have been in my situation, I'm sure they'll deduce that my visit to the arcade reflects my inadequacy or some inadequacy in the person I'm living with, that either I "can't get any" or I'm not satisfied with what I can get. As a result, I try to look at ease during the walk to the door: any evident discomfiture on my part, I warn myself, will only fuel whatever laughter my presence has provoked.

Once inside an arcade or a theater, this anxiety about being seen continues, though with a different slant: will I run smack into someone I know? Of course, anyone I would run into would be unlikely to misunderstand the meaning of my presence; but such a meeting would interfere with what seems to me the most fundamental dimension of going to a porn arcade or moviehouse: the desire for privacy and anonymity. Meeting someone I know would, I assume (this has never hap-

pened to me), force us to join together in the phony macho pose of pretending that our interest in the pornographic materials around us is largely a matter of detached humor, that we've come for a few laughs.

The concern for privacy determines the nature of the interaction of the men (I've seen women at porn theaters, but never in porn arcades) involved with porn. Of course, theaters are constructed so as to impede the interactions of members of the audience (I always feel a pressure not to look at people on my way out), but the structure of arcades makes some interaction between strangers almost inevitable. In retrospect, the nature and apparent meaning of this interaction always seems rather poignant. Because of our shared embarrassment about being in this place together and, perhaps, because of our awareness that our presence is a sign of an erotic impatience our casual stances belie—for whatever reason, the men I've seen in porn arcades seem to allow themselves a detached gentleness with each other. For my part—and, judging from my limited observation, I'd guess my experience is pretty standard—I move in an unthreatening way; I am careful not to make eye contact with anyone. When eye contact is unavoidable, I put my mind on erase. When I walk out of a porn arcade, I take with me no functional memory at all of the particular faces I saw there, though each visit has confirmed my feeling that in general the faces are those of quiet middle-class men pretty much like me.

I've always assumed that, essentially, those of us who co-exist with each other for a few minutes in porn theaters or arcades share the embarrassing awareness that we're there for the same thing: to look for awhile at forbidden sexual imagery which excites us and, finally, to masturbate. In my experience, the masturbation itself seems less important as an experience than as a way of releasing the excitement created by the imagery. Even though most men seem to look rigorously frontward in porn theaters and even though porn arcade booths are designed so as to provide enough security for masturbation, the idea of being seen masturbating has always seemed so frightening to me (and, I assume, to others: I've never seen or heard anyone masturbate in an arcade) that I've never felt free to get deeply involved in the act the way I can when I have real privacy. Usually at a porn arcade I keep myself from masturbating for ten or twenty minutes, until I'm ready to leave; the act itself rarely takes more than fifteen or thirty seconds, and as soon as it's over, I'm on my way to my car. I move quickly because, often, despite my confidence that the other men I see have much the same experience I do, I leave terrified that someone will enter the booth I've just left, see the semen on the floor—impossible in the dimly lit booths—and yell after me. I've never masturbated in a theater (though on rare occasions I've seen others do so), but only later, outside the theater, in the privacy of a car or a men's room.

Since the reason for braving the kinesic complexity of the porn environment is exposure to the pornographic materials themselves, it's important to consider what these materials really are. Over the years I've developed what I hope is a generally accurate sense of the motifs that dominate standard porn fare directed at heterosexual men; and I've thought a good deal about why these particular motifs seem so pervasive. I'm speaking of "motifs" here rather than of "films" because the films seem centered (both in terms of the time allocated to specific imagery and in terms of the viewing gaze) on specific configurations, "acts." Even though there's always a skeletal narrative, this is so obviously a function of the need to create a context for the motifs, that one doesn't need to pay particular attention to it—except insofar as it raises the adrenalin by slightly withholding the awaited imagery.[2] The empty nature of the porn narratives is confirmed by the booths, which, in my experience, have all presented Super-8 films in loops, usually two or three films to a loop. Since each quarter, or whatever the fee is, buys only 30 seconds or so of film (then the film stops until another quarter is deposited), one doesn't automatically see a film from start to finish. The motif structure is also reconfirmed by the announcements on booth doors of the particular acts which are featured in particular booths.[3]

For me the obvious amateurishness of the production values, the acting, and the writing has generally added to the titillating mood, since what the characters do to and with each

other is all the more outrageous *because* it's so patently done for the camera. In fact, some acts appear so uncomfortable and pleasureless for the actors that the camera's presence seems the only possible explanation. Our consciousness of the films as films is maintained by the camera angles, the length of shots, the lighting, all of which are usually (or at least this is how I remember them) overtly functional, providing a clear view of the sex acts between the actors and between their close-up genitals. In most films "aesthetics" are rigorously avoided in service of clarity.[4]

The motifs themselves have generally involved a relatively limited number of sexual interactions. Sexual intercourse in a variety of poses is nearly inevitable, of course, but it's rarely the clincher in a film. Judging from my limited experience, blow jobs (especially ending in ejaculation into the woman's mouth or on her face) and anal intercourse seem the present-day favorites. Sometimes they involve more than a pair of partners (two men have intercourse—one vaginally, one anally—with one woman; two women provide a blow job to one man; a woman gives a blow job to one man while another has intercourse with her) and/or a mixture of ethnic backgrounds. While the women involved seem to mirror conventional notions of attractiveness, the men are frequently quite average-looking: nearly any man will do, apparently, so long as he has a large erection.

No doubt the psychology of wanting to view sexual performances on a movie screen is complex, but over the years I've been aware of two general functions of the experience: one of these involves its "educational" value, the other its value as psychic release. When I was younger, my interest was in seeing just what the female body looked like and how it moved. Sexuality, as I experienced it as an adolescent, was something that usually occurred in the dark, in enclosed spaces, and under the pressure of time. Often I was more engrossed in the issue of "how far I was going to be able to go" than with really seeing and understanding what I was doing. In those days (the fifties) there were no porn films or arcades, but newsstands were beginning to stock *Playboy, Nugget,* and a variety of other girlie magazines; and my hunger to see women's bodies—and to be able to examine them without the embarrassment of being observed by the women—resulted in periodic thefts of magazines. These thefts were serious extralegal transgressions to me; I was terrified of being caught, arrested and made an example of, until I developed the courage to try buying magazines from drugstore owners. These early magazines seemed a godsend to me, and they provided the stimulation for countless hours of masturbation. But they were also carefully censored: the focus was on breasts, though there were frequent side views of demurely posed buttocks; and all vestiges of pubic hair were, for some strange reason, erased from the photographs. (I didn't realize this until I was 17 and had the shock of my life during a heavy petting session.) One can certainly imagine a culture, like that of the Polynesians, in which the bodies of members of the opposite sex would not be visual mysteries, where we could be at ease with seeing each other. But though that has never been the case here, men continue to grow up under considerable pressure to know "how to handle" women sexually: we're supposed to know what's where and how it works. Looking at girlie magazines may seem (and be) a callous manipulation of female bodies, but its function was never callous for me. I was powerfully drawn to women, but my complete ignorance of them frightened me; the magazines were like a nightlight: they allowed me to know a little more than I otherwise would have and they allowed me the fantasy (I always knew it was an illusion) that I'd "know what to do" the next time I got to see and touch a flesh and blood woman.

The functioning of pornographic imagery as a means of allowing men to examine the bodies of the opposite sex seems an important aspect of porn films and videotapes, which are full of extreme close-ups of cocks thrusting into cunts. The ludicrous lack of romance in such imagery is often mentioned in condemnations of pornography, but the function seems more scientific than romantic, more like Muybridge's motion studies than a Hollywood love story. And it seems to me that the value of this visual option continues to be defensible, at least in a limited sense, given this society's pervasive marketing of rigidly defined standards of attractiveness. For one thing, direct sexual experience with a conventionally attractive woman is, or seems, out

of the question for many men; and yet it's come to be one of the definers of a life worth living. Pornography provides a compromise by making visual knowledge of such an experience a possibility. Secondly, many men feel supportive enough of women to take them seriously when they complain about the invasion of privacy implicit in the unprovoked leers and comments they continue to endure on the street. I'll go to considerable lengths to avoid intruding in this way, but I have to fight the urge to stare all the time. Some of the popularity of pornography even among men who consider themselves feminists may be a function of its capacity to provide a form of unintrusive leering.

I've become conscious of a second aspect of this first function of pornographic materials, the "educational" function, during the past few years. Feminists have made us aware of the politics of staring at women, but the culture at large—particularly the culture as evident in the commercial sphere—tells us constantly that looking at women is what men are supposed to do. Looking at other men continues to be another matter entirely. Of course, spectator sports, and other forms of physical performance, allow for almost unlimited examination of how bodies function, but knowledge of the naked male body continues to be a tricky matter for heterosexual men. In conventional American life men are probably naked together more often than women: in shower rooms, most obviously. And yet, as is true in porn arcades, the kinesics of the interaction between men in such places are very precisely controlled. Men certainly don't feel free to look at other men; our lives are full of stories about how one guy catches another looking at him and punches him out. Never mind that I've never witnessed such an incident: a taboo is at stake, and potential embarrassment, if not danger, seems to hover on the edge of it. This situation is complicated further by the fact that even if men felt free to look carefully at each other in shower rooms, or wherever, a crucial element of the male body—how it functions during sexual activity—would remain a mystery. Of course, I know what my own erection looks like, but so much stress is placed on the nature of erections that it's difficult not to wonder what the erections of other men look like (and how mine looks in comparison).

One of the things that distinguishes the pornographic materials available in porn movies and arcades from what is available on local newsstands—and thus, implicitly, one of the things that accounts for the size of the hardcore porn market—is the pervasive presence of erections. In fact, to a considerable extent theater and arcade porn films are about erections. The standard anti-porn response to this is to see the porn film phallus as a combined battering ram/totem which encapsulates the male drive for power. And given the characterizations of the vain strutting men on the other ends of these frequently awesome shafts, such an interpretation seems almost inevitable. And yet, for me the pervasiveness of erect penises in porn has at least as much to do with simple curiosity. The darkness of porn houses and the privacy of arcade booths allow one to see erections close-up. The presence of women has its own power, but in this particular context one of the primary functions of the female presence is to serve as a sign—to others and to oneself—that looking at erections, even finding them sexy, does not mean that the viewer defines himself as a homosexual.

A second function of the pornographic experience involves the exact converse of a number of cultural attitudes which feminists have often seen as subtly detrimental to women. Most people now recognize that the constant attention to the "beauty" of the female body, which has been so pervasive in the arts and in commerce during recent centuries, may involve more than a respect and love for women —that it may be a tactic for keeping them more involved with how they look (and to a considerable extent, with pleasing men) than with what they do, or can learn to do. Further, the emphasis on a pristine ideal of beauty, as feminists have often pointed out, has frequently alienated women from their own bodies: real odors, secretions, processes have frequently been seen as contradictory of the Beauty of Womanhood. On the other hand, the same cultural history which has defined women as Beautiful has had, and to some extent continues to have, as its inevitable correlary, the Ugliness of men; women have been defined as beautiful precisely in contrast to men. Now, even if these definitions are seen as primarily

beneficial to men, in the sense that not having to be concerned with appearances allows them more energy and time for attaining their goals and maintaining their access to power, I sense that the definition also creates significant problems for men, and especially in the areas of love and sex, where physical attractiveness seems of the essence. In recent years we've seen a growing acceptance of the idea that men, too, can be beautiful. The burgeoning homosexual subculture seems evidence of this, as does the popularity of body building. And yet, just as the pressure to see women as "the weaker sex" continues to be felt in a culture where millions of women dramatize the intrinsic bankruptcy of that notion, many men—I'd guess most men—continue to feel insecure about the attractiveness of their bodies.

Perhaps the most obvious aspect of male sexual functioning which has been conditioned by negative assumptions about male attractiveness is ejaculation. Even among people who are comfortable with the idea that men can be beautiful, semen is often (if not usually) seen as disgusting. Is it an accident that many of the substances that our culture considers particularly revolting—raw egg, snot . . . — share with semen a general texture and look? Accidental or not, I've heard and read such comparisons all my life. I remember the shock and fear that followed my first orgasm. Without knowing it, I had been masturbating in the attic of my aunt's house where I had discovered a pile of girlie magazines. The unexpected orgasm was astonishing and thrilling, but at the end of it, I discovered, to my shock, that my shirt and the magazine were covered with a substance I hadn't known existed. I cleaned myself up (even at that early point I was clear that for my relatives—especially for my mother and my aunt—the mysterious substance would be seen as a form of dirtiness), and I spent the remainder of the day walking around with my arms and hands in odd configurations in front of my shirt in the hope of avoiding detection. From that time on, I was alert to the fact that every indulgence of my desire for sex would produce evidence the discovery of which, I was sure, could be humiliating.

Now I'm well aware that to accept a mucus-like substance that comes out of one's own body is a different matter than accepting such a substance from another's body. I not only understand, but can empathize with the revulsion of many women to semen. Nevertheless, I suspect it creates the same problems for many men as the widespread squeamishness about menstruation has caused women. There are instances of course—in the midst of passion—where semen is temporarily accepted, even enjoyed by women, but these moments tend to be memorable exceptions. For the most part, even between people who love each other, the presence of semen is at best a necessary evil. Recently I mentioned this idea to a woman friend, who has had sex with many men and is proud of it, after she had indicated her contempt for men who were turned off by women's smells and secretions. "I think it depends on who you're with," she said. "If you care about the person, there's nothing disgusting about his semen." A few seconds later she added, "But who has to lie in it?" and laughed. Many women are concerned about the danger of "bleeding through" during menstruation, presumably because they feel, or fear that men feel, that menstrual secretions make them sexually undesirable; and dozens of products have been marketed to protect against such an occurrence. I feel a similar concern about semen, and must face a very special irony: the fact that it surfaces precisely at the moment of my most complete sexual abandon.

To me, the nature and function of pornography have always seemed understandable as a way for men to periodically deal with the cultural context which mitigates against their full acceptance of themselves as sexual beings. The fantasies men pay to experience in porn arcade booths and movie houses may ostensibly appear to be predicated on the brutalization of women. But from a male point of view, the desire is not to see women harmed, but to momentarily identify with men who—despite their personal unattractiveness by conventional cultural definitions, despite the unwieldy size of their erections, and despite their aggressiveness with their semen—are adored by the women they encounter sexually. Only in pornography will the fantasy woman demonstrate aggressive acceptance when a man ejaculates on her face. As embarrassingly abhorrent as it always strikes me, the hostility

toward women which usually seems to hover around the edges of conventional film pornography (in the frequently arrogant, presumptive manner the male characters exhibit, for example) and which is a primary subject matter in some films, seems to be a more aggressive way of dealing with the same issues. In these instances the fantasy is in punishing resistant women for their revulsion. Of course, the punishments—usually one form of rape or another—often end with the fantasy woman's discovery of an insatiable hunger for whatever has been done to her. This frequent turnabout appears to be nothing more than a reconfirmation of the stupid, brutal myth that women ask to be raped or enjoy being raped, but—as sadly ironic as this seems—it could also be seen as evidence that, in the final analysis, men don't mean harm to women, or don't wish to mean harm to women: their fantasy is the acceptance of their own biological nature by women.[5] I've always assumed that porn and rape *are* part of the same general problem, though I've always felt it more likely that porn offers an outlet for some of the anger engendered by men's feelings of sensual/aesthetic inferiority, than that it serves as a fuel for further anger. But I'm only speaking from my own experience. I've rarely spoken frankly about such matters with men who use porn.

To try to understand the reasons for the huge business of making and marketing pornographic movies is not necessarily to justify the practice. One can only hope for increasingly definitive studies of how porn functions and what its effects are.[6] But, however one describes the complex historical factors which have brought us to our present situation, the fact remains that in our culture men and women frequently feel alienated from their own bodies and from each other. Pornography is a function of this alienation, and I can't imagine it disappearing until we have come to see ourselves and each other differently. We don't choose the bodies we are born with; natural selection, or God—or whatever—takes care of that for us. And though we can't change the fact of our difference (and regardless of whether we choose to accept and enjoy this difference by being passionate about our own or the opposite sex, or both), surely we can learn to be mutually supportive about our bodies. My guess is that porn is a symptom not so much of a sexual need, but of a need for self-acceptance and respect. If we can come to terms with that need, as it relates to both sexes, my guess is that porn will disappear.

NOTES

1. During my twenties and early thirties I would guess I went to porn films and/or arcades half a dozen times a year. In the past few years (I'm 40) I've gone less frequently; it probably works out to two or three times a year at most. I assume that some men frequent such places, while others go once or twice in a lifetime. I have no information on how often or seldom an "average" man pays to see pornography. I've not been conscious of specific changes in the situations presented in the films or the attitudes which are evident in them. I assume there has been some evolution in this regard, but my experiences have been too sporadic (and too surrounded by personal anxieties) for me to be able to formulate useful conclusions about this evolution.

2. In this sense, the porn narratives seem rather similar to those of Georges Méliès's films (the acting is roughly comparable, too!).

3. Once I've decided to go to a porn theater, I go immediately, without checking to see when the movies begin or end; as often as not, I arrive in the middle of a film. (This is true only when the theater in questions runs shows continuously; when a theater runs only one or two shows a day, I usually postpone a decision about going until just long enough before the beginning of the show so that the decision can be followed by immediate action.) With very rare exceptions, I've always left before a show is over; after one film has led up to and past its most stimulating motifs, I've waited only long enough to calm down and not leave the theater with a visible erection. I've never sat all the way through a double feature of porn films.

4. Recent "trash" and "punk" films—John Waters's *Multiple Maniacs, Pink Flamingos, Female Trouble, Desperate Living;* Beth and Scott B's *G-Man,* Robert Huot's *Dr. Faustus' Foot Fetish,* for example—have exploited a similar sense of aggressive amateurishness. In fact, since *G-Man* and *Dr. Faustus' Foot Fetish* are Super-8 films, they bring with them something of the feel of Super-8 porn loops.

5. The frequency of anal sex in porn films seems to confute this, at least if one assumes that anal sex is annoying and painful for most, or many, women. Yet, a decision not to press for fulfillment of such a desire because its fulfillment will cause pain doesn't necessarily eliminate the desire. I would guess that for many men the anal sex in porn films functions as a way of giving harmless vent to a desire they've decided not to pressure the real women in their lives about (harmless, that is, unless one assumes the women in the films feel they are being harmed, something I have no information about).

6. One recent attempt to assess porn's effects is Dolf Zillmann and Jennings Bryant's "Pornography, Sexual Callousness, and the Trivialization of Rape," *Journal of Communication* (Autumn 1982). Unfortunately, this study's central finding—"our investigation focused on sexual callousness toward women, demonstrating that massive exposure to standard pornographic materials devoid of coercion and aggression seemed to promote . . . callousness (in particular, the trivialization of rape . . ."—is based on testing procedures and supported by assumptions which raise nagging questions. The study's conclusions are based on a test of the impact of pornography on students exposed in groups, in a college setting, to "massive," "intermediate," and "no" amounts of conventional, nonviolent pornographic film. But in real life, porn films are seen in a very particular environment, at least in most instances I know of: in a public/private context

outside the circle of one's friends and family, in places one is embarrassed about going into, and often in tiny toilet-like stalls. Wouldn't the meaning and impact of porn films be different given so different a context? Was there some reason for limiting those tested to students, and in particular to undergraduates "at a large eastern university"? Were these people users of pornography previously? What was their motivation for participating in such an experiment?

Bryant and Zillman face some of the possible implications of their experimental procedures for their results, but they assume that, at most, students might have guessed the researchers were attempting to legitimize pornography and therefore would have distorted answers in the direction of a general social attitude which, the researchers contend, is strongly supportive of pornography, and implicitly legitimizes it by giving it legal status. My sense of the general attitude toward porn is the opposite of theirs. Certainly the legality of pornography doesn't prove that society approves of it: picking one's nose is legal, but hardly acceptable in society's eyes. My guess is that most people (including many or most of those who use porn and/or are supportive of its being available publicly to people of legal age) agree that porn is creepy and disgusting. And most people nowadays are well aware of the frequent conjecture that exposure to porn is an incentive to rape; even if we're dubious about the assumption of cause/effect in this instance, the contention creates concern. If the students tested were relatively new to porn, their massive exposure must have come as something of a shock, and if they were jolted—particularly by seeing such imagery in an institutional, unprivate context—might not some students have answered the rape questions posed later as a means of acceding to the widely held assumption that people who see porn films will be motivated by them to rape women?

BILL NICHOLS

The Voice of Documentary

It is worth insisting that the strategies and styles deployed in documentary, like those of narrative film, change; they have a history. And they have changed for much the same reasons: the dominant modes of expository discourse change; the arena of ideological contestation shifts. The comfortably accepted realism of one generation seems like artifice to the next. New strategies must constantly be fabricated to re-present "things as they are" and still others to contest this very representation.

In the history of documentary we can identify at least four major styles, each with distinctive formal and ideological qualities.[1] In this article I propose to examine the limitations and strengths of these strategies, with particular attention to one that is both the newest and in some ways the oldest of them all.[2]

The direct-address style of the Griersonian tradition (or, in its most excessive form, the March of Time's "voice of God") was the first thoroughly worked-out mode of documentary. As befitted a school whose purposes were overwhelmingly didactic, it employed a supposedly authoritative yet often presumptuous off-screen narration. In many cases this narration effectively dominated the visuals, though it could be, in films like *Night Mail* or *Listen to Britain,* poetic and evocative. After World War II, the Griersonian mode fell into disfavor (for reasons I will come back to later) and it has little contemporary currency—except for television news, game and talk shows, ads and documentary specials.

Its successor, *cinéma vérité,* promised an increase in the "reality effect" with its directness, immediacy, and impression of capturing untampered events in the everyday lives of particular people. Films like *Chronicle of a Summer, Le Joli Mai, Lonely Boy, Back-Breaking Leaf, Primary* and *The Chair* built on the new technical possibilities offered by portable cameras and sound recorders which could produce synchronous dialogue under location conditions. In pure *cinéma vérité* films, the style seeks to become "transparent" in the same mode as the classical Hollywood style—capturing people in action, and letting the viewer come to conclusions about them unaided by any implicit or explicit commentary.

Sometimes mesmerizing, frequently perplexing, such films seldom offered the sense of history, context or perspective that viewers seek. And so in the past decade we have seen a third style which incorporates direct address (characters or narrator speaking directly to the viewer), usually in the form of the interview. In a host of political and feminist films, witness-participants step before the camera to tell their story. Sometimes profoundly

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revealing, sometimes fragmented and incomplete, such films have provided the central model for contemporary documentary. But as a strategy and a form, the interview-oriented film has problems of its own.

More recently, a fourth phase seems to have begun, with films moving toward more complex forms where epistemological and aesthetic assumptions become more visible. These new self-reflexive documentaries mix observational passages with interviews, the voice-over of the film-maker with intertitles, making patently clear what has been implicit all along: documentaries always were forms of re-presentation, never clear windows onto "reality"; the film-maker was always a participant-witness and an active fabricator of meaning, a producer of cinematic discourse rather than a neutral or all-knowing reporter of the way things truly are.

Ironically, film theory has been of little help in this recent evolution, despite the enormous contribution of recent theory to questions of the production of meaning in narrative forms. In documentary the most advanced, modernist work draws its inspiration less from post-structuralist models of discourse than from the working procedures of documentation and validation practiced by ethnographic film-makers. And as far as the influence of film history goes, the figure of Dziga Vertov now looms much larger than those of either Flaherty or Grierson.

I do not intend to argue that self-reflexive documentary represents a pinnacle or solution in any ultimate sense. It is, however, in the process of evolving alternatives that seem, in our present historical context, less obviously problematic than the strategies of commentary, *vérité,* or the interview. These new forms may, like their predecessors, come to seem more "natural" or even "realistic" for a time. But the success of every form breeds its own overthrow: it limits, omits, disavows, represses (as well as represents). In time, new necessities bring new formal inventions.

As suggested above, in the evolution of documentary the contestation among forms has centered on the question of "voice." By "voice" I mean something narrower than style: that which conveys to us a sense of a text's social point of view, of how it is speaking to us and how it is organizing the materials it is presenting to us. In this sense "voice" is not restricted to any one code or feature such as dialogue or spoken commentary. Voice is perhaps akin to that intangible, moiré-like pattern formed by the unique interaction of all a film's codes, and it applies to all modes of documentary.

Far too many contemporary film-makers appear to have lost their voice. Politically, they forfeit their own voice for that of others (usually characters recruited to the film and interviewed). Formally, they disavow the complexities of voice, and discourse, for the apparent simplicities of faithful observation or respectful representation, the treacherous simplicities of an unquestioned empiricism (the world and its truths exist; they need only be dusted off and reported). Many documentarists would appear to believe what fiction film-makers only feign to believe, or openly question: that film-making creates an objective representation of the way things really are. Such documentaries use the magical template of verisimilitude without the story teller's open resort to artifice. Very few seem prepared to admit through the very tissue and texture of their work that all film-making is a form of discourse fabricating its effects, impressions, and point of view.

Yet it especially behooves the documentary film-maker to acknowledge what she/he is actually doing. Not in order to be accepted as modernist for the sake of being modernist, but to fashion documentaries that may more closely correspond to a contemporary understanding of our position within the world so that effective political/formal strategies for describing and challenging that position can emerge. Strategies and techniques for doing so already exist. In documentary they seem to derive most directly from *A Man with a Movie Camera* and *Chronique d'un été* and are vividly exemplified in David and Judith MacDougall's Turkana trilogy (*Lorang's Way, Wedding Camels, A Wife Among Wives*). But before discussing this tendency further, we should first examine the strengths and limitations of *cinéma vérité* and the interview-based film. They are well-represented by two recent and highly successful films: *Soldier Girls* and *Rosie the Rivetter.*

SOLDIER GIRLS (publicity still)

Soldier Girls presents a contemporary situation: basic army training as experienced by women volunteers. Purely indirect or observational, *Soldier Girls* provides no spoken commentary, no interviews or titles, and like Fred Wiseman's films, it arouses considerable controversy about its point of view. One viewer at Filmex interjected, "How on earth did they get the Army to let them make such an incredibly anti-Army film?" What struck that viewer as powerful criticism, though, may strike another as an honest portrayal of the tough-minded discipline necessary to learn to defend oneself, to survive in harsh environments, to kill. As in Wiseman's films, organizational strategies establish a preferred reading—in this case, one that favors the personal over the political, that seeks out and celebrates the irruptions of individual feeling and conscience in the face of institutional constraint, that re-writes historical process as the expression of an indomitable human essence whatever the circumstance. But these strategies, complex and subtle like those of realist fiction, tend to ascribe to the historical material itself meanings that in fact are an effect of the film's style or voice, just as fiction's strategies invite us to believe that "life" is like the imaginary world inhabited by its characters.

A pre-credit sequence of training exercises which follows three women volunteers ends with a freeze-frame and iris-in to isolate the face of each woman. Similar to classic Hollywood-style vignettes used to identify key actors, this sequence inaugurates a set of strategies that links *Soldier Girls* with a large part of American *cinéma vérité* (*Primary, Salesman, An American Family,* the *Middletown Series*). It is characterized by a romantic individualism and a dramatic, fiction-like structure, but employing "found" stories rather than the wholly invented ones of Hollywood. Scenes in which Private Hall oversees punishment for Private Alvarez and in which the women recruits are awakened and prepare their beds for Drill Sergeant Abing's inspection prompt an impression of looking in on a

world unmarked by our, or the camera's, act of gazing. And those rare moments in which the camera or person behind it is acknowledged certify more forcefully that other moments of "pure observation" capture the social presentation of self we too would have witnessed had we actually been there to see for ourselves. When *Soldier Girls'* narrative-like tale culminates in a shattering moment of character revelation, it seems to be a happy coincidence of dramatic structure and historical events unfolding. In as extraordinary an epiphany as any in all of *vérité,* tough-minded Drill Sergeant Abing breaks down and confesses to Private Hall how much of his own humanity and soul has been destroyed by his experience in Vietnam. By such means, the film transcends the social and political categories which it shows but refuses to name. Instead of the personal becoming political, the political becomes personal.

We never hear the voice of the film-maker or a narrator trying to persuade us of this romantic humanism. Instead, the film's structure relies heavily on classical narrative procedures, among them: (1) a chronology of apparent causality which reveals how each of the three women recruits resolves the conflict between a sense of her own individuality and army discipline; (2) shots organized into dramatically revelatory scenes that only acknowledge the camera as participant-observer near the film's end, when one of the recruits embraces the film-makers as she leaves the training base, discharged for her "failure" to fit in; and (3) excellent performances from characters who "play themselves" without any inhibiting self-consciousness. (The phenomenon of filming individuals who play themselves in a manner strongly reminiscent of the performances of professional actors in fiction could be the subject of an extended study in its own right.) These procedures allow purely observational documentaries to asymptotically narrow the gap between a fabricated realism and the apparent capture of reality itself which so fascinated André Bazin.

This gap may also be looked at as a gap between evidence and argument.[3] One of the peculiar fascinations of film is precisely that it so easily conflates the two. Documentary displays a tension arising from the attempt to make statements about life which are quite general, while necessarily using sounds and images that bear the inescapable trace of their particular historical origins. These sounds and images come to function as signs; they bear meaning, though the meaning is not really inherent in them but rather conferred upon them by their function within the text as a whole. We may think we hear history or reality speaking to us through a film, but what we actually hear is the voice of the text, even when that voice tries to efface itself.

This is not only a matter of semiotics but of historical process. Those who confer meaning (individuals, social classes, the media and other institutions) exist within history itself rather than at the periphery, looking in like gods. Hence, paradoxically, self-referentiality is an inevitable communicational category. A class cannot be a member of itself, the law of logical typing tells us, and yet in human communication this law is necessarily violated. Those who confer meaning are themselves members of the class of conferred meanings (history). For a film to fail to acknowledge this and pretend to omniscience—whether by voice-of-God commentary or by claims of "objective knowledge"—is to deny its own complicity with a production of knowledge that rests on no firmer bedrock than the very act of production. (What then becomes vital are the assumptions, values, and purposes motivating this production, the underpinnings which some modernist strategies attempt to make more clear.)[4]

Observational documentary appears to leave the driving to us. No one tells us about the sights we pass or what they mean. Even those obvious marks of documentary textuality—muddy sound, blurred or racked focus, the grainy, poorly lit figures of social actors caught on the run—function paradoxically. Their presence testifies to an apparently more basic absence: such films sacrifice conventional, polished artistic expression in order to bring back, as best they can, the actual texture of history in the making. If the camera gyrates wildly or ceases functioning, this is not an expression of personal style. It is a signifier of personal danger, as in *Harlan County,* or even death, as in the street scene from *The Battle of Chile* when the camera man records the moment of his own death.

This shift from artistic expressiveness to

historical revelation contributes mightily to the phenomenological effect of the observational film. *Soldier Girls, They Call Us Misfits,* its sequel, *A Respectable Life,* and Fred Wiseman's most recent film, *Models,* propose revelations about the real not as a result of direct argument, but on the basis of inferences we draw from historical evidence itself. For example, Stefan Jarl's remarkable film, *They Call Us Misfits,* contains a purely observational scene of its two 17-year-old misfits—who have left home for a life of booze, drugs and a good time in Stockholm—getting up in the morning. Kenta washes his long hair, dries it, and then meticulously combs every hair into place. Stoffe doesn't bother with his hair at all. Instead, he boils water and then makes tea by pouring it over a tea bag that is still inside its paper wrapper! We rejoin the boys in *A Respectable Life,* shot ten years later, and learn that Stoffe has nearly died on three occasions from heroin overdoses whereas Kenta has sworn off hard drugs and begun a career of sorts as a singer. At this point we may retroactively grant a denser tissue of meaning to those little morning rituals recorded a decade earlier. If so, we take them as evidence of historical determinations rather than artistic vision—even though they are only available to us as a result of textual strategies. More generally, the aural and visual evidence of what ten years of hard living do to the alert, mischievous appearance of two boys—the ruddy skin, the dark, extinguished eyes, the slurred and garbled speech, especially of Stoffe—bear meaning precisely because the films invite retroactive comparison. The films produce the structure in which "facts" themselves take on meaning precisely because they belong to a coherent series of differences. Yet, though powerful, this construction of differences remains insufficient. A simplistic line of historical progression prevails, centered as it is in *Soldier Girls* on the trope of romantic individualism. (Instead of the Great Man theory we have the Unfortunate Victim theory of history—inadequate, but compellingly presented.)

And where observational cinema shifts from an individual to an institutional focus, and from a metonymic narrative model to a metaphoric one, as in the highly innovative work of Fred Wiseman, there may still be only a

Fred Wiseman's MODELS (Zipporah Films, 54 Lewis Walk, Boston, MA 02110).

weak sense of constructed meaning, of a textual voice addressing us. A vigorous, active and retroactive reading is necessary before we can hear the voice of the textual system as a level distinct from the sounds and images of the evidence it adduces, while questions of adequacy remain. Wiseman's sense of context and of meaning as a function of the text itself remains weak, too easily engulfed by the fascination that allows us to mistake film for reality, the impression of the real for the experience of it. The risk of reading *Soldier Girls* or Wiseman's *Models* like a Rorshach test may require stronger counter-measures than the subtleties their complex editing and *mise-en-scène* provide.

Prompted, it would seem, by these limitations to *cinéma vérité* or observational cinema, many film-makers during the past decade have reinstituted direct address. For the most part this has meant social actors addressing us in interviews rather than a return to the voice-of-authority evidenced by a narrator. *Rosie the Rivetter,* for example, tells us about the blatant hypocrisy with which women were recruited to the factories and assembly lines during World War II. A series of five women witnesses tell us how they were denied the respect granted men, told to put up with hazardous conditions "like a man," paid less, and pitted against one another racially. *Rosie* makes short shrift of the noble icon of the woman worker as seen in forties newsreels. Those films celebrated her heroic contribution to the great effort to preserve the free world from fascist dictatorship. *Rosie* destroys this myth of deeply appreciated, fully rewarded contribution without in any way undercutting the genuine fortitude, courage, and political

ROSIE THE RIVETTER *(Clarity Films, 4560 Horton, Emeryville, CA 94608)*

awareness of women who experienced continual frustration in their struggles for dignified working conditions and a permanent place in the American labor force.

Using interviews, but no commentator, together with a weave of compilation footage as images of illustration, director Connie Field tells a story many of us may think we've heard, only to realize we've never heard the whole of it before.

The organization of the film depends heavily on its set of extensive interviews with former "Rosies." Their selection follows the direct-cinema tradition of filming ordinary people. But *Rosie the Rivetter* broadens that tradition, as *Union Maids, The Wobblies* and *Babies and Banners* have also done, to retrieve the memory of an "invisible" (suppressed more than forgotten) history of labor struggle. The five interviewees remember a past the film's inserted historical images reconstruct but in counterpoint: their recollection of adversity and struggle contrasts with old newsreels of women "doing their part" cheerfully.

This strategy complicates the voice of the film in an interesting way. It adds a contemporary, personal resonance to the historical, compilation footage without challenging the assumptions of that footage explicitly, as a voice-over commentary might do. We ourselves become engaged in determining how the women witnesses counterpoint these historical "documents" as well as how they articulate their own present and past consciousness in political, ethical, and feminist dimensions.

We are encouraged to believe that these voices carry less the authority of historical judgment than that of personal testimony—they are, after all, the words of apparently "ordinary women" remembering the past. As in many films that advance issues raised by the women's movement, there is an emphasis on individual but politically significant experience. *Rosie* demonstrates the power of the act of naming—the ability to find the words that render the personal political. This reliance on oral history to reconstruct the past places *Rosie the Rivetter* within what is probably the predominant mode of documentary

filmmaking today—films built around a string of interviews—where we also find *A Wive's Tale, Babies and Banners, Controlling Interest, The Day After Trinity, The Trials of Alger Hiss, Rape, Word is Out, Prison for Women, This Is Not a Love Story, Nuove Frontieras (Looking for Better Dreams)* and *The Wobblies.*

This reinstitution of direct address through the interview has successfully avoided some of the central problems of voice-over narration, namely authoritative omniscience or didactic reductionism. There is no longer the dubious claim that things are as the film presents them, organized by the commentary of an all-knowing subject. Such attempts to stand above history and explain it create a paradox. Any attempt by a speaker to vouch for his or her own validity reminds us of the Cretan paradox: "Epimenides was a Cretan who said, 'Cretans always lie.' Was Epimenides telling the truth?" The nagging sense of a self-referential claim that can't be proven reaches greatest intensity with the most forceful assertions, which may be why viewers are often most suspicious of what an apparently omniscient Voice of Authority asserts most fervently. The emergence of so many recent documentaries built around strings of interviews strikes me as a strategic response to the recognition that neither can events speak for themselves nor can a single voice speak with ultimate authority. Interviews diffuse authority. A gap remains between the voice of a social actor recruited to the film and the voice of the film.

Not compelled to vouch for their own validity, the voices of interviewees may well arouse less suspicion. Yet a larger, constraining voice may remain to provide, or withhold, validation. In *The Sad Song of Yellow Skin, The Wilmar 8, Harlan County, USA, This is Not a Love Story,* or *Who Killed the Fourth Ward,* among others, the literal voice of the film-maker enters into dialogue but without the self-validating, authoritative tone of a previous tradition. (These are also voices without the self-reflexive quality found in Vertov's, Rouch's or the MacDougalls' work.) Diary-like and uncertain in *Yellow Skin;* often directed toward the women strikers as though by a fellow participant and observer in *Wilmar 8* and *Harlan County;* sharing personal reactions to pornography with a companion in *Not a Love Story;* and adopting a mock ironic tone reminiscent of Peter Falk's Columbo in *Fourth Ward*—these voices of potentially imaginary assurance instead share doubts and emotional reactions with other characters and us. As a result they seem to refuse a privileged

THE WILLMAR *8 (California Newsreel, 630 Natoma Street, San Francisco, CA 94103)*

position in relation to other characters. Of course, these less assertive authorial voices remain complicit with the controlling voice of the textual system itself, but the effect upon a viewer is distinctly different.

Still, interviews pose problems. Their occurrence is remarkably widespread—from *The Hour of the Wolf* to *The MacNiel/Lehrer Report* and from *Housing Problems* (1935) to *Harlan County, USA*. The greatest problem, at least in recent documentary, has been to retain that sense of a gap between the voice of interviewees and the voice of the text as a whole. It is most obviously a problem when the interviewees display conceptual inadequacy on the issue but remain unchallenged by the film. *The Day After Trinity,* for example, traces Robert F. Oppenheimer's career but restricts itself to a Great Man theory of history. The string of interviews clearly identify Oppenheimer's role in the race to build the nuclear bomb, and his equivocations, but it never places the bomb or Oppenheimer within that larger constellation of government policies and political calculations that determined its specific use or continuing threat—even though the interviews took place in the last few years. The text not only appears to lack a voice or perspective of its own, the perspective of its character-witnesses is patently inadequate.

In documentary, when the voice of the text disappears behind characters who speak to us, we confront a specific strategy of no less ideological importance than its equivalent in fiction films. When we no longer sense that a governing voice actively provides or withholds the imprimatur of veracity according to its own purposes and assumptions, its own canons of validation, we may also sense the return of the paradox and suspicion interviews should help us escape: the word of witnesses, uncritically accepted, must provide its own validation. Meanwhile, the film becomes a rubber stamp. To varying degree this diminution of a governing voice occurs through parts of *Word Is Out, The Wobblies, Babies and Banners* and *Prison for Women*. The sense of a hierarchy of voices becomes lost.[5] Ideally this hierarchy would uphold correct logical typing at one level (the voice of the text remains of a higher, controlling type than the voices of interviewees) without denying the inevitable collapse of logical types at another (the voice of the text is not above history but part of the very historical process upon which it confers meaning). But at present a less complex and less adequate sidetracking of paradox prevails. The film says, in effect, "Interviewees never lie." Interviewees say, "What I am telling you is the truth." We then ask, "Is the interviewee telling the truth?" but find no acknowledgement in the film of the possibility, let alone the necessity, of entertaining this question as one inescapable in all communication and signifcation.

As much as anyone, Emile de Antonio, who pioneered the use of interviews and compilation footage to organize complex historical arguments without a narrator, has also provided clear signposts for avoiding the inherent dangers of interviews. Unfortunately, most of the film-makers adopting his basic approach have failed to heed them.

De Antonio demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the category of the personal. He does not invariably accept the word of witnesses, nor does he adopt rhetorical strategies (Great Man theories, for example) that limit historical understanding to the personal. Something exceeds this category, and in *Point of Order, In the Year of the Pig, Milhouse: A White Comedy,* and *Weather Underground,* among others, this excess is carried by a distinct textual voice that clearly judges the validity of what witnesses say. Just as the voice of John Huston in *The Battle of San Pietro* contests one line of argument with another (that of General Mark Clark, who claims the costs of battle were not excessive, with that of Huston, who suggests they were), so the textual voice of de Antonio contests and places the statements made by its embedded interviews, but without speaking to us directly. (In de Antonio and in his followers, there is no narrator, only the direct address of witnesses.)

This contestation is not simply the express support of some witnesses over others, for left against right. It is a systematic effect of placement that retains the gaps between levels of different logical type. De Antonio's overall expository strategy in *In the Year of the Pig,* for example, makes it clear that no one wit-

ness tells the whole truth. De Antonio's voice (unspoken but controlling) makes witnesses contend with one another to yield a point of view more distinctive to the film than to any of its witnesses (since it includes this very strategy of contention). (Similarly, the unspoken voice of *The Atomic Cafe*—evident in the extraordinarily skillful editing of government nuclear weapons propaganda films from the fifties—governs a preferred reading of the footage it compiles.) But particularly in de Antonio's work, different points of view appear. History is not a monolith, its density and outline given from the outset. On the contrary, *In the Year of the Pig,* for example, constructs perspective and historical understanding, and does so right before our eyes.

We see and hear, for example, US government spokesmen explaining their strategy and conception of the "Communist menace," whereas we do not see and hear Ho Chi Minh explain his strategy and vision. Instead, an interviewee, Paul Mus, introduces us to Ho Chi Minh descriptively while de Antonio's cutaways to Vietnamese countryside evoke an affiliation between Ho and his land and people that is absent from the words and images of American spokesmen. Ho remains an uncontained figure whose full meaning must be conferred, and inferred, from available materials as they are brought together by de Antonio. Such construction is a textual, and cinematic, act evident in the choice of supporting or ironic images to accompany interviews, in the actual juxtaposition of interviews, and even in the still images that form a pre-credit sequence inasmuch as they unmistakably refer to the American Civil War (an analogy sharply at odds with US government accounts of Communist invasion). By juxtaposing silhouettes of Civil War soldiers with GIs in Vietnam, the pre-credit sequence obliquely but clearly offers an interpretation for the events we are about to see. De Antonio does not subordinate his own voice to the way things are, to the sounds and images that are evidence of war. He acknowledges that the meaning of these images must be conferred upon them and goes about doing so in a readily understood though indirect manner.

De Antonio's hierarchy of levels and reservation of ultimate validation to the highest level (the textual system or film as a whole)

In the Year of the Pig

differs radically from other approaches. John Lowenthal's *The Trials of Alger Hiss,* for example, is a totally subservient endorsement of Hiss's legalistic strategies. Similarly, *Hollywood on Trial* shows no independence from the perhaps politically expedient but disingenuous line adopted by the Hollywood 10 over thirty years ago—that HUAC's pattern of subpoenas to friendly and unfriendly witnesses primarily threatened the civil liberties of ordinary citizens (though it certainly did so) rather than posing a more specific threat to the CPUSA and American left (where it clearly did the greatest damage). By contrast, even in *Painters Painting* and *Weather Underground,* where de Antonio seems unusually close to validating uncritically what interviewees say, the subtle voice of his *mise en scène* preserves the gap, conveying a strong sense of the distance between the sensibilities or politics of those interviewed and those of the larger public to whom they speak.

De Antonio's films produce a world of dense complexity: they embody a sense of constraint and over-determination. Not everyone can be believed. Not everything is true. Characters do not emerge as the autonomous

shapers of a personal destiny. De Antonio proposes ways and means by which to reconstruct the past dialectically, as Fred Wiseman reconstructs the present dialectically.[6] Rather than appearing to collapse itself into the consciousness of character witnesses, the film retains an independent consciousness, a voice of its own. The film's own consciousness (surrogate for ours) probes, remembers, substantiates, doubts. It questions and believes, including itself. It assumes the voice of personal consciousness at the same time as it examines the very category of the personal. Neither omniscient deity nor obedient mouthpiece, de Antonio's rhetorical voice seduces us by embodying those qualities of insight, skepticism, judgment and independence we would like to appropriate for our own. Nonetheless, though he is closer to a modernist, self-reflexive strategy than any other documentary filmmaker in America—with the possible exception of the more experimental feminist filmmaker, Jo Ann Elam—de Antonio remains clearly apart from this tendency. He is more a Newtonian than an Einsteinian observer of events; he insists on the activity of fixing meaning, but it is meaning that does, finally, appear to reside "out there" rather than insisting on the activity of producing that "fix" from which meaning itself derives.

There are lessons here we would think de Antonio's successors would be quick to learn. But, most frequently, they have not. The interview remains a problem. Subjectivity, consciousness, argumentative form and voice remain unquestioned in documentary theory and practice. Often, film-makers simply choose to interview characters with whom they agree. A weaker sense of skepticism, a diminished self-awareness of the film-maker as producer of meaning or history prevails, yielding a flatter, less dialectical sense of history and a simpler, more idealized sense of character. Characters threaten to emerge as stars—flashpoints of inspiring, and imaginary, coherence contradictory to their ostensible status as ordinary people.[7]

These problems emerge in three of the best history films we have (and in the pioneering gay film, *Word Is Out*), undermining their great importance on other levels. *Union Maids, With Babies and Banners,* and *The Wobblies* flounder on the axis of personal

UNION MAIDS

respect and historical recall. The films simply suppose that things were as the participant-witnesses recall them, and lest we doubt, the film-makers respectfully find images of illustration to substantiate the claim. (The resonance set up in *Rosie the Rivetter* between interviews and compilation footage establishes a perceptible sense of a textual voice that makes this film a more sophisticated, though not self-reflexive, version of the interview-based documentary.) What characters omit to say, so do these films, most noticeably regarding the role of the CPUSA in *Union Maids* and *With Babies and Banners. Banners,* for example, contains one instance when a witness mentions the helpful knowledge she gained from Communist Party members. Immediately, though, the film cuts to unrelated footage of a violent attack on workers by a goon squad. It is as if the textual voice, rather than provide independent assessment, must go so far as to find diversionary material to offset presumably harmful comments by witnesses themselves!

These films naively endorse limited, selective recall. The tactic flattens witnesses into a series of imaginary puppets conforming to a line. Their recall becomes distinguishable more by differences in force of personality than by differences in perspective. Backgrounds loaded with iconographic meanings transform witnesses further into stereotypes (shipyards, farms, union halls abound, or for the gays and lesbians in *Word Is Out,* bedrooms and the bucolic out-of-doors). We sense a great relief when characters step out of these closed, iconographic frames and into more open-ended ones, but such "release" usually occurs only at the end of the films where it also signals the achievement of expository closure—another kind of frame. We return to the simple claim, "Things were as these witnesses describe them, why contest them?" —a claim which is a dissimulation and a disservice to both film theory and political praxis. On the contrary, as de Antonio and Wiseman demonstrate quite differently, Things signify, but only if we make them comprehensible.[8]

Documentaries with a more sophisticated grasp of the historical realm establish a preferred reading by a textual system that asserts its own voice in contrast to the voices it recruits or observes. Such films confront us with an alternative to our own hypotheses about what kind of things populate the world, what relations they sustain, and what meanings they bear for us. The film operates as an autonomous whole, as we do. It is greater than its parts and orchestrates them: (1) the recruited voices, the recruited sounds and images; (2) the textual "voice" spoken by the style of the film as a whole (how its multiplicity of codes, including those pertaining to recruited voices are orchestrated into a singular, controlling pattern); and (3) the surrounding historical context, including the viewing event itself, which the textual voice cannot successfully rise above or fully control. The film is thus a simulacrum or external trace of the production of meaning we undertake ourselves every day, every moment. We see not an image of imaginary unchanging coherence, magically represented on a screen, but the evidence of an historically rooted act of making things meaningful comparable to our own historically situated acts of comprehension.

With de Antonio's films, *The Atomic Cafe, Rape,* or *Rosie the Rivetter* the active counterpointing of the text reminds us that its meaning is produced. This foregrounding of an active production of meaning by a textual system may also heighten our conscious sense of self as something also produced by codes that extend beyond ourselves. An exaggerated claim, perhaps, but still suggestive of the difference in effect of different documentary strategies and an indication of the importance of the self-reflexive strategy itself.

Self-reflexiveness can easily lead to an endless regression. It can prove highly appealing to an intelligentsia more interested in "good form" than in social change. Yet interest in self-reflexive forms is not purely an academic question. *Cinéma vérité* and its variants sought to address certain limitations in the voice-of-god tradition. The interview-oriented film sought to address limitations apparent in the bulk of *cinéma vérité,* and the self-reflexive documentary addresses the limitations of assuming that subjectivity and both the social and textual positioning of the self (as filmmaker or viewer) are ultimately not problematic.

Modernist thought in general challenges this assumption. A few documentary filmmakers, going as far back as Dziga-Vertov and certainly including Jean Rouch, and the hard-to-categorize Jean-Luc Godard, adopt the basic epistemological assumption in their work that knowledge and the position of the self in relation to the mediator of knowledge, a given text, are socially and formally constructed and should be shown to be so. Rather than inviting paralysis before a centerless labyrinth, however, such a perspective restores the dialectic between self and other: neither the "out there" nor the "in here" contains its own inherent meaning. The *process* of constructing meaning overshadows constructed meanings. And at a time when modernist experimentation is old-hat within the avant-garde and a fair amount of fiction film-making, it remains almost totally unheard of among documentary film-makers, especially in North America. It is not political documentarists who have been the leading innovators. Instead it is a handful of ethnographic film-makers like Timothy Asch (*The Ax Fight*), John Marshall (*Nai!*) and David and Judith MacDougall who, in their meditations on

scientific method and visual communication, have done the most provocative experimentation.

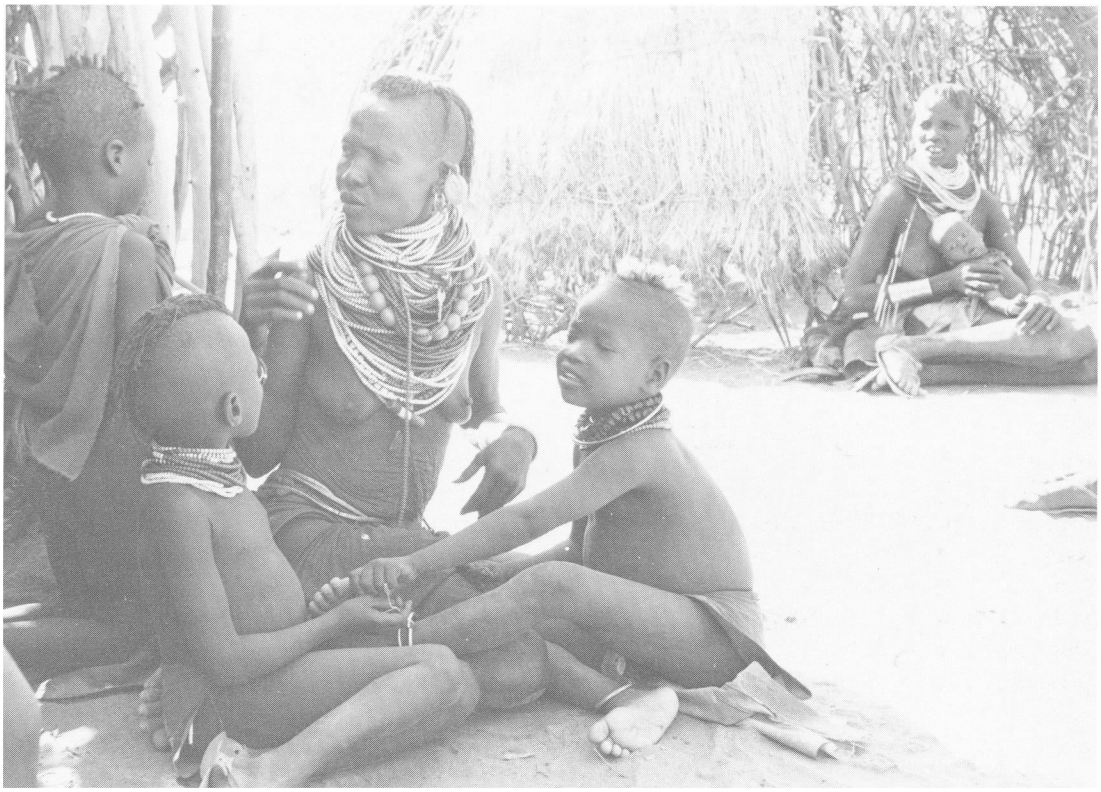
Take the MacDougalls' *Wedding Camels* (part of the Turkana trilogy), for example. The film, set in Northern Kenya, explores the preparations for a Turkana wedding in day-to-day detail. It mixes direct and indirect address to form a complex whole made up of two levels of historical reference—evidence and argument—and two levels of textual structure—observation and exposition.

Though *Wedding Camels* is frequently observational and very strongly rooted in the texture of everyday life, the film-makers' presence receives far more frequent acknowledgment than it does in *Soldier Girls,* or Wiseman's films, or most other observational work. Lorang, the bride's father and central figure in the dowry negotiations, says at one point, with clear acknowledgment of the film-makers' presence, "They [Europeans] never marry our daughters. They always hold back their animals." At other moments we hear David MacDougall ask questions of Lorang or others off-camera much as we do in *The Wilmar 8* or *In the Year of the Pig.* (This contrasts with *The Wobblies, Union Maids* and *Babies and Banners* where the questions to which participant witnesses respond are not heard.) Sometimes these queries invite characters to reflect on events we observe in detail, like the dowry arrangements themselves. On these occasions they introduce a vivid level of self-reflexiveness into the characters' performance as well as into the film's structure, something that is impossible in interview-based films that give us no sense of a character's present but only use his or her words as testimony about the past.

Wedding Camels also makes frequent use of intertitles which mark off one scene from another to develop a mosaic structure that necessarily admits to its own lack of completeness even as individual facets appear to exhaust a given encounter. This sense of both incompleteness and exhaustion, as well as the radical shift of perceptual space involved in going from apparently three-dimensional images to two-dimensional graphics that comment on or frame the image, generates a strong sense of a hierarchical and self-referential ordering.

For example, in one scene Naingoro, sister to the bride's mother, says, "Our daughters are not our own. They are born to be given out." The implicit lack of completeness to individual identity apart from social exchange then receives elaboration through an interview sequence with Akai, the bride. The film poses questions by means of intertitles and sandwiches Akai's responses, briefly, between them. One intertitle, for example, phrases its question more or less as follows, "We asked Akai whether a Turkana woman chooses her husband or if her parents choose for her." Such phrasing brings the film-maker's intervention strongly into the foreground.

The structure of this passage suggests some of the virtues of a hybrid style: the titles serve as another indicator of a textual voice apart from that of the characters represented. They also differ from most documentary titles which, since the silent days of *Nanook,* have worked like a graphic "voice" of authority. In *Wedding Camels* the titles, in their mock-interactive structure, remain closely aligned with the particulars of person and place rather than appearing to issue from an omniscient consciousness. They show clear awareness of how a particular meaning is being produced by a particular act of intervention. This is not presented as a grand revelation but as a simple truth that is only remarkable for its rarity in documentary film. These particular titles also display both a wry sense of humor and a clear perception of the meaning an individual's marriage has for him or her as well as for others (a vital means of countering, among other things, the temptation of an ethnocentric reading or judgment). By "violating" the coherence of a social actor's diegetic space, intertitles also lessen the tendency for the interviewee to inflate to the proportions of a star-witness. By acting self-reflexively such strategies call the status of the interview itself into question and diminish its tacit claim to tell the whole truth. Other signifying choices, which function like Brechtian distancing devices, would include the separate "spaces" of image and intertitle for question/response; the highly structured and abbreviated question/answer format; the close up, portrait-like framing of a social actor that pries her away from a matrix of on-going activities or a stereotypical background, and the clear acknowl-



THE WEDDING CAMELS

edgment that such fabrications exist to serve the purposes of the film rather than to capture an unaffected reality.

Though modest in tone, *Wedding Camels* demonstrates a structural sophistication well beyond that of almost any other documentary film work today. Whether its modernist strategies can be yoked to a more explicitly political perspective (without restricting itself to the small avant-garde audience that exists for the Godards and Chantal Akermanns), is less a question than a challenge still haunting us, considering the limitations of most interview-based films.

Changes in documentary strategy bear a complex relation to history. Self-reflexive strategies seem to have a particularly complex historical relation to documentary form since they are far less peculiar to it than the voice-of-god, *cinéma vérité* or interview-based strategies. Although they have been available to documentary (as to narrative) since the 'teens, they have never been as popular in North America as in Europe or in other regions (save among an avant-garde). Why they have recently made an effective appearance within the documentary domain is a matter requiring further exploration. I suspect we are dealing with more than a reaction to the limitations of the currently dominant interview-based farm. Large cultural preferences concerning the voicing of dramatic as well as documentary material seem to be changing. In any event, the most recent appearances of self-reflexive strategies correspond very clearly to deficiencies in attempts to translate highly ideological, written anthropological practices into a proscriptive agenda for a visual anthropology (neutrality, descriptiveness, objectivity, "just the facts" and so on). It is very heartening to see that the realm of the possible for documentary film has now expanded to include strategies of reflexivity that may eventually serve political as well as scientific ends.

NOTES

1. Many of the distinctive characteristics of documentary are examined broadly in *Ideology and the Image* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), pp. 170–284. Here I shall concentrate on more recent films and some of the particular problems they pose.

2. Films referred to in the article or instrumental in formulating

the issues of self-reflexive documentary form include: *The Atomic Cafe* (USA, Kevin Rafferty, Jayne Loader, Pierce Rafferty, 1982), *Controlling Interest* (USA, SF Newsreel, 1978), *The Day After Trinity* (USA, Jon Else, 1980), *Harlan County, USA* (USA, Barbara Kopple, 1976), *Hollywood on Trial* (USA, David Halpern, Jr., 1976), *Models* (USA, Fred Wiseman, 1981), *Nuove Frontiera* (*Looking for Better Dreams*) (Switzerland, Remo Legnazzi, 1981), *On Company Business* (USA, Allan Francovich, 1981), *Prison for Women* (Canada, Janice Cole, Holly Dale, 1981), *Rape* (USA, JoAnn Elam, 1977), *A Respectable Life* (Sweden, Stefan Jarl, 1980), *Rosie the Rivetter* (USA, Connie Field, 1980); *The Sad Song of Yellow Skin* (Canada, NFB—Michael Rubbo, 1970), *Soldier Girls* (USA, Nick Broomfield, Joan Churchill, 1981); *They Call Us Misfits* (Sweden, Jan Lindquist, Stefan Jarl, c. 1969), *Not a Love Story!* (Canada, NFB—Bonnie Klein, 1981), *The Trials of Alger Hiss* (USA, John Lowenthal, 1980), *Union Maids* (USA, Jim Klein, Julia Reichert, Miles Mogulescu, 1976), *Who Killed the Fourth Ward?* (USA, James Blue, 1978), *The Wilmar 8* (USA, Lee Grant, 1980), *With Babies and Banners* (USA, Women's Labor History Film Project, 1978), *A Wive's Tale* (Canada, Sophie Bissonnette, Martin Duckworth, Joyce Rock, 1980), *The Wobblies* (USA, Stuart Bird, Deborah Shaffer, 1979), *Word is Out* (USA, Mariposa Collective, 1977).

3. Perhaps the farthest extremes of evidence and argument occur with pornography and propaganda: what would pornography be without its evidence, what would propaganda be without its arguments?

4. Without models of documentary strategy that invite us to reflect on the construction of social reality, we have only a corrective act of negation ("this is not reality, it is neither omniscient nor objective") rather than an affirmative act of comprehension ("this is a text, these are its assumptions, this is the meaning it produces"). The lack of an invitation to assume a positive stance handicaps us in our efforts to understand the position we occupy; refusing a position proffered to us is far from affirming a position we actively construct. It is similar to the difference between refusing to "buy" the messages conveyed by advertising, at least entirely, while still lacking any alternative non-fetishistic presentation of commodities that can help us gain a different "purchase" on their relative use- and exchange-value. In many ways, this problem of moving from refusal to affirmation, from protest at the way things are to the construction of durable alternatives, is precisely the problem of the American left. Modernist strategies have something to contribute to the resolution of this problem.

5. After completing this article, I read Jeffrey Youdelman's "Narration, Invention and History" (*Cineaste,* 12:2, pp. 8–15) which makes a similar point with a somewhat different set of examples. His discussion of imaginative, lyrical uses of commentary in the thirties and forties is particularly instructive.

6. Details of de Antonio's approach are explored in Tom Waugh's "Emile de Antonio and the New Documentary of the Seventies," *Jump Cut,* no. 10/11 (1976), pp. 33–39 and of Wiseman's in my *Ideology and the Image,* pp. 208–236.

7. An informative discussion of the contradiction between character witnesses with unusual abilities and the rhetorical attempt to make them signifiers of ordinary workers, particularly in *Union Maids,* occur in Noel King's "Recent 'Political' Documentary—Notes on *Union Maids* and *Harlan County USA,*" *Screen,* vol. 22, no. 2 (1981), pp. 7–18.

8. In this vein, Noel King comments "So in the case of these documentaries (*Union Maids, With Babies and Banners, Harlan County, USA*) we might notice the way a discourse of morals or ethics suppresses one of politics and the way a discourse of a subject's individual responsibility suppresses any notion of a discourse on the social and linguistic formation of subjects" ("Recent 'Political' Documentary," p. 11). But we might also say, as the film-makers seem to, "This is how the participants saw their struggle and it is well-worth preserving" even though we may wish they did not do so slavishly. There is a difference between criticizing films because they fail to demonstrate the theoretical sophistication of certain analytic methodologies and criticizing them because their textual organization is inadequate to the phenomena they describe.

JAMES ROY MacBEAN

Two Laws from Australia, One White, One Black,

THE RECENT PAST AND THE CHALLENGING FUTURE OF ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM

Recently, a new documentary film dealing with Australian Aboriginal peoples and their historical struggles to preserve (or win back) their traditional lands has been screened in the US, mostly on the West Coast but also in New York City, where it was presented in October at the 1982 Margaret Mead Film Festival. Completed in 1981, *Two Laws* is a feature-length documentary that succeeds both in being informative and in undercutting many of our expectations regarding ethnographic films in particular, and documentary films in general.

Already hailed in Australia, where its subject matter—Aboriginal land rights—is considered politically controversial, *Two Laws* was nominated for (although it did not win) the Australian Film Institute's 1982 award

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for best documentary. At a running time of two hours and ten minutes, *Two Laws* is an ambitious, complex, problematic film that was made *collectively* (and I mean this word quite literally and rigorously) by two white Australian film-makers, Alessandro Cavadini and Caroline Strachan, and the Borroloola Aboriginal community from the remote Gulf of Carpentaria region of Australia's Northern Territory.

The questions raised by *Two Laws* will have to be taken seriously in ethnographic film circles, and elsewhere as well, if for no other reason (but there are others) than the fact that this is a film, unlike 99.9% of ethnographic films,[1] in which the traditional (or tribal) peoples themselves collectively controlled the decision-making processes of what to film and how to film it—even down to what lens to use on the camera. That the results, cinematically, look so different from what we are accustomed to seeing in even the "best" ethnographic films up to now, certainly causes us to sit up and take notice, and to raise questions (and doubts) about how ethnographic film-makers have been proceeding.

Two Laws: *Filming in progress*

INTERNATIONAL ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM CONFERENCE 1978, CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA

In addition to raising important questions, *Two Laws* may also provide at least a tentative answer to a question posed in 1978 at the International Ethnographic Film Conference, which I attended, in Canberra, Australia. This conference was a major event in ethnographic film circles; it had strong participation from—and reverberations among—Australia's Aboriginal peoples; and several of the individuals who subsequently went on to collaborate on the film *Two Laws* participated in this conference; so it seems important to offer, by way of background, a summary of the way various issues in ethnographic film were discussed at this lively and seminal conference.

One conference participant, Roger Sandall (himself an ethnographic film-maker in Australia) reported in *Sight and Sound* (Autumn 1978) on the remarkable and volatile mix of people gathered from around the globe at this conference—a mix that included not only ethnographic film-makers and anthropologists

but also, for a change, various representatives of the traditional peoples the ethnographers usually study. Of course, most conferences, as Colin Young (who featured prominently in this one) has recently pointed out, are really about *power*. Young, head of Britain's National Film School, puts the issues this way:

> Go to most conferences and the subject, no matter what is on the agenda, is power. Which methodology is going to win out? People invest in their methods to the exclusion of others. The method defines you, and you it. If I criticize your method I harm you. It's a way of saying that I don't like you. . . . Supporters of a methodology are racist with respect to all others.[2]

At the 1978 conference, *power* was certainly very much at issue. Indeed, it was even placed on the official agenda by the conference convenors, David and Judith MacDougall—eminent ethnographic film-makers themselves, and resident directors of the Film Unit of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, which hosted the conference. Sympathetic with Aboriginal peoples' increasingly vociferous demands to be provided access to the media and to the means of film and television *production,* the MacDougalls had scheduled a session in the conference agenda to explore these issues. However, the amount of time allotted was not considered sufficient by many invited participants, who requested, and were granted, a session on these issues, which was scheduled for the final day of the conference.

Before that final day, the struggle for power was carried out in the territory staked out by Colin Young—that of rival documentary film methodologies. As the conference's senior statesman, Young presented the opening salvo, offering his own summary of documentary film history. Young spoke of the accomplishments, but mainly of the dangers and limitations of the Grierson approach ("too polemical and didactic"); of the virtues of the Flaherty approach ("he got close to his subjects"); of the fundamental flaws in Robert Gardner's filmic strategies in *Dead Birds* ("he *tells* us on the sound track information not substantiated by the image"); and of the refreshingly participatory filmic strategies of Jean Rouch ("in *Turou et Bitti* the film-maker almost functions as the combustion element in a ritual leading to trance").

In addition, Young turned over the podium briefly to Timothy Asch, who delivered homage to John Marshall for his longstanding dedication to filming the !Kung Bushmen of the Kalahari. (Asch, a former associate of Marshall's, has gone on to make a number of important films on the Yanomamo of the Orinoco Basin in collaboration with anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon.) Finally, Young also spoke of the breakthroughs made in the early sixties by the practitioners, mostly French, Canadian and American, of *cinéma vérité.*

All this could be taken as uncontroversial documentary film "history"; but there was also a tendentious side to Young's presentation. As he toted up the assets and liabilities of each documentary approach, Young wove a clearly discernible thread of apparent historical "progress" into the chaotic fabric of documentary film history, in such a way that, in his account, it would seem to reach some at-least-for-the-present optimum realization of its potential (and, implicitly, of its "realist vocation") in the contemporary methodology of what Young calls "observational cinema."

This approach consists of a refined version of *cinéma vérité*'s ability to use light-weight, unobtrusive equipment and a minimal crew (often only two persons) to film long takes in synchronous sound of the ordinary interactions and conversations of people going about their regular daily lives. It is demonstrated, Young asserted, in the films of David and Judith MacDougall as well as in the *Vermont Conversations* series by Hancock and DiGioia (and in their film *Naim and Jabar* for the *Faces of Change* project), and in Roger Graef's studies of decision-making for the two British television series, *The Space Between Words* and *Decision.*

As Colin Young would be the first to admit, there is a decidedly "incestuous" cast to the lineup he proposes under the rubric of observational cinema. The MacDougalls, Hancock and DiGioia all got their start in film as students in the ethnographic film program started by Young (and Walter Goldschmidt) at UCLA in the late sixties. Of course, the community of film-makers, anthropologists, and other scholars involved in the world of ethnographic film is a fairly small community in any case. We have all known one another from way back. I have known the MacDou-

galls as close friends for about twenty years; and I have known Colin Young (through the MacDougalls) nearly as long. Friendship notwithstanding, I would have no hesitation in picking the MacDougalls' films (from their first, *To Live With Herds,* right up to their latest films dealing with Australian Aboriginal peoples) as representing the best of contemporary tendencies in ethnographic film. However, I must take issue with Colin Young on one point, because I am not convinced (nor was I at the 1978 conference) that the complex filmic strategies employed by the MacDougalls are done justice by the term "observational cinema." (I shall deal with these issues in the following section of this essay.)

Where Young's historical survey of documentary film at the conference is concerned, Bill Nichols pointed out in his remarks to the conference that while Young's presentation had been interesting as a personal account of how Young, and presumably others, had found their own path through the thicket of documentary methodologies, the thicket itself had not really been cleared for cultivation on solid theoretical ground; and the discussions were strangely devoid of recourse to recent developments in film theory, communications theory or anthropology itself.

Indeed, it became clear in ensuing days that what was being presented was a low-keyed, disarmingly attractive yet tendentious version of both the history and the present situation of ethnographic film—as seen by proponents of one particular school of documentary methodology. The morning after Young's opening presentation, the mantle was passed to James Blue, a long-time friend and associate of both Young and the MacDougalls, who announced that his contribution would be to demonstrate in more detail, and with specific illustrations, the general line set out by Young's opening talk. Blue's presentation emphasized the virtues of Robert Flaherty's filmic strategies, exemplified by a seal-hunting sequence from Flaherty's *Nanook,* which was projected side-by-side with a sequence (also showing seal-hunting) from Asen Balikci's Netsilik Eskimo series of films.

Blue's argument was that Balikci, although one of our contemporary ethnographic filmmakers, had reverted to an older, anachronistic and more "didactic" style of shooting and editing ethnographic film. Blue's comparison of the two sequences was all to the favor of Flaherty, who was credited with simply letting the action unfold in front of the camera instead of breaking the action up into different edited pieces shot from different camera angles.

The only trouble—and Blue, sensing this, got off to an awkward and somewhat nervous start—was that the morning's audience wasn't ready to buy this praise of Flaherty, at least partly because the previous evening's conference event had turned into a tumultuous debate touched off by a screening of Flaherty's 1934 film *Man of Aran,* followed by George Stoney's just-completed documentary exploration of *Robert Flaherty's "Man of Aran": How The Myth Was Made.* Stoney's film, while appreciative of Flaherty's genius for poetic imagery, had popped the lid off all the distortions and omissions in Flaherty's highly romanticized depiction of life on the Aran Islands off Ireland.

Many in the audience at the conference's première screening of Stoney's revelatory documentary had been incensed at what they now saw to be Flaherty's falsification of the life he had purported to be documenting. Particularly troublesome was Flaherty's total lack of interest in the actual sociopolitical affairs of the Islanders, who, in his film, are represented by only three people—significantly, a nuclear family of man, wife and son—whose highly romanticized struggle for survival in an awesomely inhospitable Nature becomes the "whole" picture.

On this issue Stoney's film effectively documents how distorted—and *politically* skewed —is Flaherty's depiction of the allegedly arid and inhospitable soil of the Aran Islands. Showing us the very same rugged, rocky terrain that Flaherty had filmed, Stoney then makes a small pan with his camera to show that with this simple camera movement one can see the lush, fertile agricultural land-holdings that were in Flaherty's day and still are in the hands of a few absentee landlords. The richest of these, Stoney observes, had in fact turned over his baronial house, the largest on the islands, to the Flahertys, where the film-maker and his wife Frances had enjoyed a quasi-feudal relationship to the impoverished Islanders during their stay.

Maggie Diranne, at 76, holds a picture of herself as heroine of MAN OF ARAN *made 44 years before. From George Stoney's* ROBERT FLAHERTY'S "MAN OF ARAN": HOW THE MYTH WAS MADE.

Such revelations as these had made their points with the conference audience. In Flaherty's retreat from the realities of the contemporary situation in favor of a highly romanticized vision of ways of life no longer practiced, many conference participants saw a betrayal of documentary film's mission to "show it like it is." Small wonder, then, that James Blue (whose subsequent death in 1980 is a loss to us all) met with such resistance when he valiantly went ahead with his presentation of the virtues of Flaherty's filmic strategies. He prefaced his remarks with an account of how he too, like others in the audience, had been influenced by his years studying film in the heady political milieu of Paris; how he too had gone through a phase of politicization during which he sought to root out all traces of "fascist" film style from his film-making repertory; and how he too had wanted, indeed still wanted, to make films that were politically constructive. But gradually he had discovered, he told us, that Flaherty's way of letting the camera simply observe what was happening had seemed to him the most honest and direct way to get at the larger truth and complexity of a situation.

It was all very affably, albeit defensively put by Blue; and there was much to consider in what he said. And yet, to many in the audience, Blue's championing of Flaherty, and his treatment of his own "politicized phase" as if it were merely a childhood stage one outgrew, smacked of an attempt to take

George Stoney (with tripod) heads up the back of the Aran cliffs

the edge off any politically activist approach to documentary film-making. At least this is how it was "read" by many of the young Australian documentary film-makers present, who also construed it as a pitch to tone down the political element in their films to make them more acceptable to the potential television market, which, according to both Young and Blue, was ready to open its doors to ethnographic film.

The possibility of television distribution, however, was perceived by the Australians to be the proverbial carrot held out in front of the horse who allows himself to be fitted with blinders. The modest success in Great Britain of Brian Moser's "Disappearing World" series of ethnographic films for Granada Television was hardly persuasive, especially when Granada's representatives to the Canberra Conference acknowledged that very few of the "Disappearing World" films had taken up in any way the vital *political* issues of why so many (but not all) tribal or traditional societies are in danger of "disappearing" in today's world.

To many conference participants, the single-minded emphasis on an "observational" camera-style (coupled with an apparent insensitivity to the political dynamics of ethnographic film-making) began to wear very thin; and a current of reaction set in against the "house style" proposed by Young and Blue. Film-makers Cavadini and Strachan, for example, later expressed their frustration with the apolitical approach that dominated the early days of the conference.

> We've been amazed at the way ethnographic film-makers deny that their films are political. This denial is enforced by a claim that the camera in particular is neutral and observational; but what is in fact produced are visions of the exotic or the romantic. This came out very strongly at the Canberra Conference. There is an explicit lack of theorising about the politics of going into and disrupting a community, or taking information and images from one society to be exploited by another.[3]

Moreover, there were problems, many of us at the conference felt, with the argument James Blue developed in his comparison of the Flaherty and Balikci footage. To present an alternative view, I pointed out that one could argue that Balikci's way of breaking a complicated process (of seal-hunting) into different shots taken from different camera angles at least had the merits of (1) revealing details of the action that might not be visible or noticed from one single camera position; and, (2) openly acknowledging the film-making process—of selecting camera angles, of shooting, of editing, etc.—at the same time as it explored the Eskimo's process of seal-hunting. In short, Balikci's filmic strategies (including his avoidance of omniscient narration on the sound track) could be credited with being both *process-oriented* and *self-reflexive.*

By contrast, I observed, Flaherty's filmic strategies in the seal-hunting sequence from *Nanook* could be seen as mystifying the processes both of seal-hunting and of filming. Flaherty sets up his camera in advance at a small hole in the ice towards which Nanook is seen to make his way from the distant background, as if searching the ice-flow for telltale signs of the presence of a seal's airhole. Thus, in effect, Flaherty gives the camera the classic, privileged narrator's point of view that implies—but does not openly acknowledge—the godlike omniscience of the film-maker while reinforcing the seemingly unimpeachable authority of the information provided by the image. Such an "impression of reality" was especially problematic, I argued, in the case of Flaherty. After all, in *Nanook* as in *Man of Aran,* the apparent "reality" being filmed is an extremely contrived re-enactment of ways of life that were never quite as romantic as Flaherty makes them out to be, and which are *not,* in any case, the ways of life of the contemporary people he is actually filming.

Moreover, even if the viewer does not notice that Flaherty's camera has been set up in advance at the very spot Nanook eventually "discovers," there is ample evidence to tip off the fact that this entire sequence is staged for the camera. At Flaherty's urging, no doubt, Nanook hams up his demonstration of the process of spearing a seal through the breathing hole in the ice. In fact, the scene is turned into slapstick comedy, with Nanook ostensibly being tugged this way and that by the not yet visible seal beneath the ice. Finally, when the seal is ultimately hauled up through the ice, it is so obviously long-dead—and

apparently frozen solid—that the entire sequence becomes ridiculous.

At the Canberra conference, the appearance of the dead seal was greeted with great hoots of laughter. Jokes were made of "the observational style of filming a frozen-seal hunt." Soon nearly everyone was taking pot shots at "observational cinema" and at Flaherty—with Blue and Young still valiantly attempting to defend their position. Finally, the session was adjourned, but many participants kept right on arguing the issues, moving in for the kill, wielding their small personal tape recorders like weapons as they endeavored to pin down, for the record, their respective antagonists. At this point, the event was laughingly dubbed "the battle of the tape recorders"—a battle of ritual warfare enacted by a strange and exotic tribe of academics and media professionals. In a verbal play on the title of James Blue's own latest film, *Who Killed Third Ward?* (about redevelopment in Houston, Texas), it was jocularly suggested that a sequel to the conference be planned, under the prospective title, "Who Killed Observational Cinema?"

This is the question I alluded to at the beginning of this article—the question to which the 1981 film *Two Laws* provides at least a tentative answer. Of course, one film, even such a probing and forceful film as *Two Laws,* does not by itself bring about the imminent demise of "observational cinema." Nor would I wish for its demise. I am confident that there will continue to be a place (or, rather, certain types of ethnographic and documentary situations) where the filmic strategies associated with observational cinema will still be fruitfully employed. However, what *Two Laws* may be instrumental in laying to rest is a notion of observational cinema as a panacea that could cure all the infirmities of ethnographic or documentary film-making.

Unfortunately, it was this more ambitious and hegemonic view that seemed to be promulgated at the 1978 conference. Doubtless sobered by the 1978 conference, and looking even further back at the formative years of observational cinema, Young now offers what amounts to his own *mea culpa:* "Without knowing it very specifically at the time, we were preparing our methodology which we would develop, refine and then practice—to the exclusion of others."[4]

Even in his *mea culpa,* however, Young may be drastically overstating things when he implies that "observational cinema" was practiced, by *film-makers,* to the exclusion of all other methodologies. Fortunately, film-makers—even those touted by Young as leading practitioners of "observational cinema," such as the MacDougalls—have been more sanguine and open-minded about what they were doing. As far back as 1971, when Colin Young was writing a manifesto-like essay entitled "Observational Cinema" for Paul Hockings's anthology, *Principles of Visual Anthropology,* David MacDougall was writing for the same anthology a more probing and exploratory essay entitled "Beyond Observational Cinema." More importantly, the *films* of the MacDougalls have always manifested a healthy multiplicity of filmic strategies.

BEYOND OBSERVATIONAL CINEMA: THE FILMS OF DAVID AND JUDITH MACDOUGALL

Much attention has been given (in print as well as at the 1978 conference) to the MacDougalls' innovative decision to dispense with the old documentary crutch of a running voice-over commentary and to rely instead on subtitled translations of native-language dialogue filmed in synch sound as normal tribal life unfolds. It has often been overlooked, however, that a MacDougall film typically presents a great variety of different kinds of filmic material, by no means all of which is "observational." In fact, the observational cinema label has always seemed to me too constricting a term to apply to the complex filmic strategies of the MacDougalls.

Their earliest film, *To Live With Herds* (1968–9), for example, offers, in addition to "observed" sequences involving interaction between two or more Jie tribespeople, other sequences in which only one tribal subject is

present and the interaction involves a dialogue between him/her and the film-makers. Sometimes this dialogue is clearly instigated by the film-makers, who are heard on the sound track asking specific questions. At other times, a Jie man or woman will talk nonchalantly while doing some chore, "addressing" the film-makers but in an informal way, as if picking up the thread of some ongoing conversation. Moreover, *To Live With Herds* makes liberal use of informational intertitles. To purists of observational cinema these would be considered didactic and anachronistic. But the MacDougalls prefer to acknowledge that there are limits to the "observational" approach and that certain kinds of information simply cannot be "caught" by observational means. And while they dispense with the running voice-over commentary of the sort that used to guide us through so many documentary films, the MacDougalls, in *To Live With Herds,* purposely utilise occasional bits and pieces of voice-over commentary in which David speaks in the first person, acknowledging the film-makers' presence and their active role in certain interactions with their tribal subjects.

In the MacDougalls' now-completed *Turkana Conversations* trilogy (*The Wedding Camels, Lorang's Way,* and *A Wife Among Wives*—which they filmed in Kenya during 1973–4 and edited between 1978 and 1981), a similarly rich variety of filmic strategies is employed. In *A Wife Among Wives* the MacDougalls actually utilise quite a lot of voice-over commentary. It is not, however, the old Olympian "voice of authority" commentary. Rather, it is the commentary of someone there on the spot, incorporating bits of field notes and journals into the film (sometimes visually as well as aurally), and yet undercutting any claims to omniscience, as the film-makers openly communicate to us some of the dilemmas, doubts, hesitations and false steps they encountered in their field work and filming.

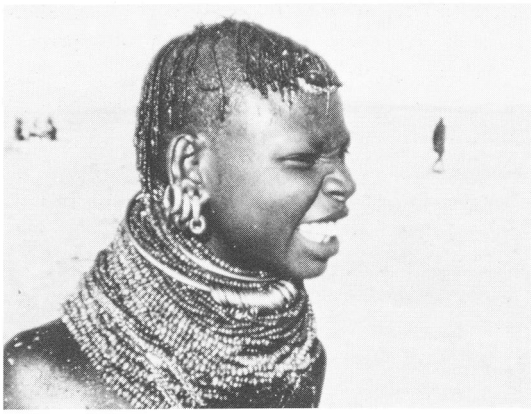
There is in fact a crucial difference between this occasional first-person commentary and the old-style commentary of the "omniscient narrator"; and, incidentally, it is a difference Colin Young seems to ignore when, writing in 1982, he asks, disparagingly, "Is it because documentary fell into the hands of the teachers, propagandists and 'communicators' that

LORANG'S WAY. *(All MacDougall films are available from UC Media Center, 2223 Fulton, Berkeley, CA 94720.)*

the first-person narrator rules supreme?"[5] *Pace,* Colin, but isn't this the pot calling the kettle black? Moreover, it has *not* been first-person commentary that has ruled supreme in documentary films. In fact, it still doesn't.* What did rule supreme in older documentaries was the omniscient narrator, the studio-voice (often that of a professional actor) which told us everything we needed to know (sic), which somehow got into every character's head and told us what they were thinking—the voice which, in John Marshall's *The Hunters,* not only knows what the Bushmen are thinking as they try to deduce from the tracks where the giraffe they have wounded might be, but knows also where the giraffe is and what is going through the giraffe's head at that same moment!

In summary, what is innovative about the MacDougalls' films is precisely that they get away from the "voice of authority" of the omniscient narrator and establish instead the direct, open acknowledgment of their presence and their active first-person presentation of the different sorts of filmic material that comprise their films. To put it another way, it seems to me that the MacDougalls are not

*Except perhaps in such television blockbuster series as David Attenborough's *Life on Earth* or Carl Sagan's "Cosmos" or Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation,* where the documentary material is "personalised" for us by a luminary who is whisked magically about the globe from shot to shot, but who is always "on the spot," no matter how remote, to offer us a first-person commentary which, however, by virtue of the apparent immensity of the luminary's erudition, also functions simultaneously as the voice of authority in the style of the old "omniscient narrator."



A Wife Among Wives: *Lokoro, the bride.*

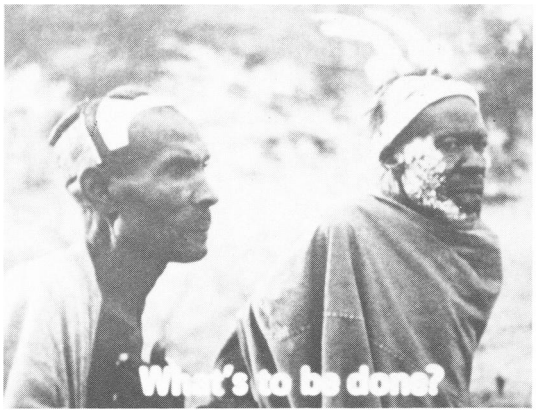
practicing a documentary cinema that is primarily "observational" and narrative in nature, as has been touted; but rather that they are combining elements (some "observational," some not) in a *collage* or mosaic pattern whose overall logic is less that of the narrative than that of the *audio-visual first-person essay*. In point of fact, their films usually have only a weak narrative (*To Live With Herds, Kenya Boran, Lorang's Way* and *A Wife Among Wives*); but even where there is a strong narrative, as in *The Wedding Camels,* the MacDougalls constantly remind us of their own interactions with people during the events being filmed and of their own structuring of the material in the editing.

The point about ethnographic film-makers acknowledging their own interactions with the people being filmed is a crucial one—and in this respect the MacDougalls' work is so exemplary that I think it could even be said to pave the way for the kind of collective creation (across cultures) represented by *Two Laws*. For example, in *A Wife Among Wives* the MacDougalls openly discuss with the Turkana such questions as "If you were making a film about Turkana life what would you film?" And when this tack gets nowhere (the Turkana answer "I don't know anything about that. You're the film-makers."), the MacDougalls turn the tables on themselves and ask the Turkana what they would film of white or "European" society if they had the chance? To which the Turkana reply, "We would not know what to film about you if we had the cameras. We would not understand properly." But a moment later, the same Turkana woman, after some reflection, says "I would film your things, your boxes, your cups and saucers, your clothes, beads as beautiful as ours; I'd film your Land-Rover." And, a bit later, given a Super-8 camera to use, she does just that, filming the interior of the MacDougalls' temporary house while David films her filming—the two cameras shooting simultaneously, and their respective footages intercut in the editing to give us a feel and a visual record of this particular interaction between two cultures.

While in *A Wife Among Wives* (and filming among the Turkana generally) this approach may not go very far, this should not, I think, be taken as mere "tokenism" on the MacDougalls' part. Rather, it demonstrates, I believe, their openness to explore the ethnographic film-making situation beyond the narrow paths set out by any one methodology which might make claims to exclusivity. In this respect, the MacDougalls don't even want to claim exclusivity for the views presented in their films—which views could come, if the tribal or "traditional" subjects were willing, as much if not more from *them* as from the MacDougalls.

Interestingly, this latter is exactly what seems to be happening in the films the MacDougalls have been making recently in Australia. Working with Australian Aboriginal peoples, the MacDougalls have made a number of films that bear little resemblance to their films from African pastoralist societies. In three films completed in 1980 (*Takeover, Familiar Places* and *The House-Opening*) the MacDougalls rely less and less on "observa-

The Wedding Camels: *Food for the wedding feast.*



THE WEDDING CAMELS

tional" material of the everyday life of their ethnographic subjects, and they concentrate increasingly on aspects of the Australian Aboriginal peoples' ongoing struggle to retain their culture and to regain their lands. In these films, as in several others, the MacDougalls are in fact devoting themselves to subjects which the Aboriginal peoples themselves have requested that they film. Often these films explore controversial issues. *Takeover,* for example, functions almost as a piece of hard-hitting investigative journalism, exposing the hypocritical double-dealing of the Australian federal government in its handling of jurisdictional disputes with the state of Queensland over the Aboriginal community at Aurukun.

When I asked the MacDougalls, in a public discussion of their films at the Margaret Mead Film Festival, how they would account for the striking differences in style between their African films and their Australian films, they replied that the Australian Aboriginal peoples, unlike the Turkana or Jie or Boran of East Africa, are already quite acculturated to western ways. The East African pastoralists paid little heed to the filming process precisely because the prospect of having a film made about their way of life meant little to them; they foresaw no *use,* to themselves, for such a film. On the other hand, the Australian Aboriginal peoples, acutely aware of the potential *uses* (to them or to others) of film and the media in general, assert themselves quite actively in delineating what they want filmed.

This, of course, was one of the things that came out at the 1978 conference in Canberra, when Aboriginal peoples emphasized quite militantly that they want to gain access to equipment and to instruction that will enable them to start making films themselves about their own struggles and the cultural issues that concern them. Which brings us, at long last, up to the making of the film *Two Laws.*

TWO LAWS: THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM

Having voiced their demands loud and clear at the 1978 Canberra Conference, and having obtained from the Institute of Aboriginal Studies a strengthened commitment to proceed faster in providing Aboriginal peoples access to equipment and to film-making instruction, Australia's Aboriginal peoples also intensified their efforts to enlist some of Australia's white documentary film-makers to work with the black communities in making films that would *express* rather than merely *observe* Aboriginal culture. Many Aboriginal communities initiated requests for films to be made, and many of these requests were directed to David and Judith MacDougall in their roles as Director and Assistant Director of the Film Unit of the Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

Already heavily involved in making a series of films requested by the Aurukun Aboriginal community (which has been in the center of Australia's most controversial political struggles over land rights, mining rights, and conflicts of federal and state jurisdiction), the MacDougalls and their staff simply couldn't handle all the requests for films coming from various Aboriginal communities.

However, the Borroloola people were determined that they wanted to make a film dealing with the history of their community. Leo Finlay had seen *Protected,* a film on the Palm Island Aboriginal community made collectively by two white Australian film-makers, Alessandro Cavadini and Caroline Strachan, in collaboration with the Palm Island community. *Protected* was a very impressive film; so Leo Finlay paid a visit to Cavadini and Strachan in Sydney and asked them for help in making a film on the Borroloola community. Cavadini and Strachan accepted the invi-

Thomas Woody Mingini of the Tiwi tribe of Melville Island works at the editing table with David MacDougall on GOODBYE OLD MAN

tation, went to Borroloola, and spent the first two months traveling from one Aboriginal settlement or camp to another, learning their proper "skin" or kinship relation within the Borroloola Aboriginal society, and discussing what sort of film the Aboriginal peoples wanted to make.

From the beginning, it was clear what the general outline of the film was to be. The Borroloola community wanted to provide a historical background to their insistence that their Aboriginal system of law was, in fact, just that—a system of law which regulated their interactions with one another and with land and property. This was important, they felt, because preliminary hearings in land rights cases during the seventies had demonstrated that white judges tended to discount Aboriginal land claims based on Aboriginal tradition whenever they were in conflict with land claims based on leases, titles and contracts recognized by white law.

Even before commencing filming, Cavadini and Strachan found that the Aboriginal sense of "law" pervaded everything the Borroloola community did. When Cavadini and Strachan arranged evening screenings of films dealing with land rights issues, the next morning there would be a formal meeting, according to Aboriginal law, where the community would collectively discuss the previous night's films, debate their strengths and weaknesses, and explore their potential use, to them and to their film, of this or that stylistic approach. Gradually, in this way, the community collectively planned what it wanted to film and how it wanted to film it.

Cavadini and Strachan gradually realized that this traditional collective decision-making process was itself a fundamental feature of Aboriginal law, that "leaders" were only ceremonial figures; and that correlatively, the formal community meeting could provide the structural base of the film. Once this was decided, it became obvious how these formal meetings were to be filmed. As Cavadini and Strachan explain it,

> Because there isn't any television and few films had been seen, the people were unfamiliar with the whole of Western film culture, so their ideas came largely from Aboriginal structure. For instance, when we got down to filming there was automatically only one position for the camera and one position for the sound recordist—because everyone has their place in a highly structured spatial arrangement. Men sit in one position, women in another, and each individual sits with particular relatives. So the determinations had to do with the tribal structure into which the film fitted as opposed to being outside it.[6]

Moreover, as Cavadini and Strachan point out, not only camera and sound positions were engendered by Aboriginal sense of law and structure, but also even the choice of what lens to use on the camera was engendered this way.

> During those first two months we did do a number of tests to try out different ideas, and the choice was made to shoot the entire film with a wide-angle lens. It was the one that people responded to and liked. With a wide-angle lens you can include much more in the shot than with a standard lens, but it's not so appropriate for close-ups. If someone wants to make a statement, others have to be present to make that statement possible—to confirm or contradict it. Sometimes there was disagreement between people but it's presented as a group discussion as opposed to one individual being the authority.[7]

The title, it was decided, should be *Two Laws;* and the film should begin with a shot of a formal meeting where Leo Finlay introduces Cavadini and Strachan by saying simply "I think you know these two, Alessandro and Caroline; they're going to help us make a film, and it's our film so let's make a good film." The camera, with its wide-angle lens, pans right to left across the seated community at the formal meeting, men on one side, women on another; and as the camera completes its pan we even see the sound recordist

—a woman, Caroline—in her designated place alongside the Borroloola women.

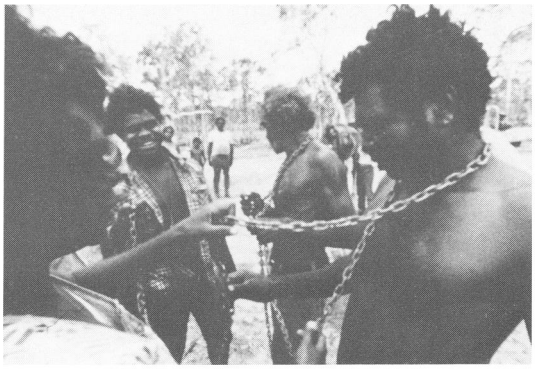
The film overall is divided into four parts, arranged chronologically (although with some overlaps) into sections called "Police Times," "Welfare Times," "Struggle for Our Land," and "Living with Two Laws." "Police Times" deals with the situation in the thirties, a period still vividly remembered by a few older members of the Borroloola community but largely unknown by most younger community members, who only learned of these times and events in the process of making the film.

Although "Police Times" focuses on one particular event that happened in 1933, especially as this event is recalled—and reenacted—by people who participated in it, there is a sense in which the present community's effort to grasp an understanding of their past is far more important than a reconstituting of the past. As Cavadini and Strachan explain it,

> "The way Aboriginal people approach history is very different from the way we see history as located firmly in the past. People talk about history in the present tense, use the first person, employ dialogue, re-enact events. In everyday life people tell stories that happened yesterday or happened one hundred years ago."[8]

The task of re-telling the past—specifically, the events of 1933, as characteristic of those times—is carried out in a complex, sophisticated combination of oral history (story-telling) and re-enactment *plus analytical commentary* on both the telling and the acting-out of history. Moreover, the re-enactment includes its own *self-reflexive* component of *analysis,* for the re-enactment is presented in a way that emphasizes the group process of play-acting. Aboriginal community members sit in rows on the ground as the camera pans or tracks to pause as each one introduces himself by saying "my name is X, and I'm playing the part of Dolly . . . or Doris . . ." and so on.

Furthermore, although they filmed enough re-enactment footage to comprise a 90-minute drama film, the Borroloola community decided not to go that route, preferring, for political reasons, to emphasize the overall *context* of events rather than the events themselves. Finally, the 1933 events—a forced march of Aboriginal peoples who were



Shooting the "Police Times" section of Two Laws

rounded up by one Constable Stott, who beat them into a forced confession of killing and eating a bullock (steer) owned by a white rancher—were judged too brutal in their depiction of violence to be used in the finished film. So it was decided instead to emphasize the acting-out strategy, to film stylized and symbolic expressions of the violence enacted upon Aboriginal peoples. Thus, there are scenes where the white actor "playing" Constable Stott symbolically lowers his stick slowly across the back of an Aboriginal man instead of bashing him with it, or slowly applies his stick first to one side of an Aboriginal woman then to the other to indicate the brutal beating which resulted in her death. And, in another scene, an old Aboriginal man describes how he was beaten across the back, first one way then another; then he grabs a stick and proceeds to demonstrate how he was beaten by bashing a tree first this way then another. "Finally," he says, "I was forced to confess. 'Yep,' I told him, 'I ate that bullock, ate the whole thing!' "

The Aboriginal peoples' sense of humor is evident in many moments of *Two Laws,* as they laugh in retrospect about what they had to endure in the past and as they revel in the chance now to recall and act out what they have experienced. This is most evident in the second part, "Welfare Times," where a group of Aboriginal women discuss with a white woman how the latter should play her part as a welfare administrator. Rehearsing a scene where the Aboriginal women have to present themselves for inspection, they coach the white woman on the lines the welfare administrator should speak. Running through the scene, the welfare woman speaks her lines in

TWO LAWS: *The "Welfare Times" section*

an impressively convincing way; and the Aboriginal women remark, "Yes, that's just the way they would talk to us; and we would just stand there and look down at our feet, not daring to speak a word."

But immediately after this remark there is a cut to another take of this same scene, with the Aboriginal women presenting themselves for inspection and the white woman saying "Good morning, have you all washed today? If you're nice and clean and if your children are nice and clean then you'll get a pretty dress for being good girls. And you'll get clothes for the children too. But if you're not clean or if your hair is untidy then you'll not get anything until you've fixed yourself up properly." And here, in this take, the Aboriginal women are shown laughing at the whole scene, dramatizing, in effect, both what used to happen to them and the distance they have come in asserting themselves.

The welfare system, as they see it, was blatantly assimilationist. By way of introducing "Welfare Times," one Aboriginal woman reads a passage from the Government's submission to the Land Claims Court, which reads as follows: "The year 1953 was the beginning of the Welfare Ordinance. Its aim was to direct and encourage the re-establishment of the Aborigenes, that they would eventually be assimilated as an integral part of the Australian community." To which, the Aboriginal woman adds, looking directly into the camera, "Which means that they wanted us to be like white people."

While assimilation was certainly the Australian government's long-term plan for the Aboriginal population (paralleling the US government position on Native Americans), at least as important was the short-term urgency of getting the Aboriginal peoples out of the way of the white mining interests that wanted access to the country's vast mineral deposits. In *Two Laws,* the Borroloola Aboriginal community recounts—and re-enacts—how they were suddenly told that their welfare station and the entire Aboriginal community would have to move to Robinson River, several hours away by truck. There was no consultation involved; they were just told to pack their things, and a government truck was provided to carry them and their possessions. Only later did they find out that large mining interests had obtained a lease on huge tracts of land around Borroloola and had insisted on the Aboriginal community's removal to make way for the vast Mt. Isa Mines operations.

The notion of two different legal concepts of land tenure (one black, one white) is best brought out by the third part of the film, "Struggle for Our Land." Interestingly, there is one sequence in this section which is filmed utilizing what might be called an observational approach. It involves a conversation between a white Australian laborer (a recent immigrant from Yugoslavia) and an Aboriginal man who is protesting that the white laborer, by razing hundreds of trees along a dirt roadway, has both diminished the Aboriginal food supply (they eat the fruit of this particular tree) and, more importantly, desecrated a sacred site which had been entrusted, ceremonially, to his particular custodianship, or *djunkai.*

The conversation is filmed in synch sound and long takes, and since both men are speaking English, there is no need for subtitling of dialogue. The white laborer questions the black man's ability to prove his "ownership" of the land. "Do you have a title to the land?" he asks. The Aboriginal man responds that when the white men came they just took the land and didn't bother with titles. The white laborer then retorts that land wasn't always just taken, that sometimes blacks actually sold land to the whites. "Can you prove," he asks, "that your father, or his father, didn't sell that land to the whites?"

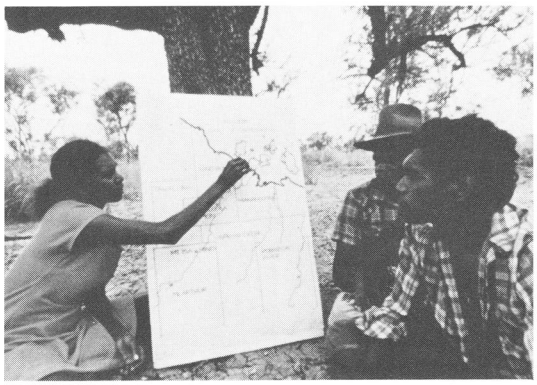
Pausing for a moment, the white laborer then continues, "And if that land was sold to the whites, then what would happen now if the government or the land claims court decided to give that land back to the blacks?

Who would pay back the money to the whites that they had originally paid the blacks for that land?" The Aboriginal man reflects on these questions for several minutes, then shakes his head stoically, observing that "You're still just thinking in white peoples' terms about all this."

The point is well taken, although it would be nice if the Aboriginal terms of communal land tenure—as opposed to private property—had been spelled out more explicitly. Apparently this is exactly what happens when the finished film is shown to audiences of other Aboriginal communities throughout Australia: they actually leap to their feet at this moment in the film and start discussing loudly exactly what *they* would have said to that white laborer. And even within the film we see the way the film-making process offers material for further work and reflection, as we later see several Aboriginal women activists listening, with ear phones, to the sound tape of that particular conversation—which stirs them to compose a letter offering *their* response to the white laborer. In short, even the observational sequence is clearly and firmly placed in the overall context of a process initiated and carried through by the Aboriginal community themselves—a process that involves them in making a film in the first place because they are above all involved in a political struggle to retain—or to regain—their traditional land.

Keeping the political context in mind, the Aboriginal community is able to incorporate into *Two Laws* some footage of traditional rituals and ceremonial dances, but in such a way that does not allow this material to fall into the trap of the exotic—where the Aboriginal is depicted as the mysterious other. Instead, by delaying any treatment of ritual until the fourth and final part of *Two Laws,* and by including footage of rituals involving some of the men, and, especially, some of the women we have come to know somewhat through the first three parts of the film, the Aboriginal community is able to provide the audience with a sense of the inter-relatedness of all these activities and of their articulation within the overall context of their ongoing lives and struggles.

All in all, the film *Two Laws* is a breakthrough of major significance in ethnographic film. It may not provide the kind of drama and action we are used to in the cinema, even in the "observational cinema"; but it provides much more important things. Above all, *Two Laws* provides the ethnographic "subjects"—in this case, the Australian Aboriginal community of Borroloola—the opportunity to express what they want to express about their lives and their culture and their struggles, and to express all this in filmic terms of their own choosing. In doing so, they may have made that "disappearing world" a bit more visible and audible again, to the benefit of all of us.



Two Laws: *"The Struggle for Our Land"*

NOTES

1. There have been a few experiments set up by white American academics to investigate whether minority sub-cultures (Navajo Indians, lower-class urban black children), given some rudimentary training with film equipment, might be able to express, in original and indigenous imagery, certain essential characteristics of their cultures. The work with Navajos by Sol Worth and John Adair resulted in a number of short pieces (of several minutes duration) of "subject-generated" film-imagery, only one example of which was thought to express genuinely "Navajo" imagery. Similar results were obtained in work with lower-class urban black children by Richard Chalfen.

2. Colin Young, "MacDougall Conversations," *Royal Anthropological Institute News,* June 1982.

3. Quoted from an interview with Cavadini and Strachan conducted by Charles Merewether and Lesley Stern, published in *Filmnews,* Sydney Filmmakers' Cooperative, April 1982, p. 8.

4. Colin Young, *op. cit.,* p. 5.

5. *Ibid.,* p. 7.

6. Quoted from Cavadini and Strachan interview cited in footnote 3 above, p. 9.

7. *Ibid.,* p. 9.

8. *Ibid.,* p. 9.

J. P. TELOTTE

Human Artifice and the Science Fiction Film

The human artifice of the world separates human existence from all mere animal environment, but life itself is outside this artificial world, and through life man remains related to all other living organisms. For some time now, a great many scientific endeavors have been directed toward making life also "artificial," toward cutting the last tie through which even man belongs among the children of nature. . . . There is no reason to doubt our abilities to accomplish such an exchange, just as there is no reason to doubt our present ability to destroy all organic life on earth. —Hannah Arendt[1]

"I know I'm human," the protagonist of John Carpenter's film *The Thing* asserts, as he frantically searches for a threatening alien presence among his comrades. Taken out of context in this way, such a declaration sounds almost pointless, like an assurance of something that should be evident to the gaze of those around, as indeed it seems to the movie viewers. The very need for such an assertion, consequently, hints at an unexpected uncertainty here, even an uneasiness about one's identity and, more importantly, about what it is that makes one human. It is an uneasiness, moreover, which cannot be dispelled by a simple gaze, the means by which we typically evaluate our world, others, and ourselves. I call attention to the character McReady's predicament because it makes overt a specter which has continually haunted the science fiction film genre. Periodically throughout its history, but increasingly so in recent years, this formula has taken as its focus the problematic nature of the human being and the difficult task of being human. And as Hannah Arendt makes clear, the former concern seems to pose an ever greater barrier for the latter.

In this context, we should note the number of recent films which take as their major concern or as an important motif the potential doubling of the human body and thus the literal creation of a human artifice. Among others, films like the remakes of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *The Thing, Blade Runner, Alien,* and even *Star Trek* explore some aspect of this motif, but especially a welcome or threatening capacity which inheres in this cloning or copying of the self, cell for cell, and which promises to make man both more and less than he already is. Not simply a current development, though, this motif runs throughout the history of science fiction film. Viewed from the perspective of their "mad scientist" themes, the numerous Frankenstein and Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde films represent paradigms of this tendency; in fact, the enduring confusion in the popular imagination that attributes the single name of Frankenstein to both a monster and its creator underscores the effect of this doubling pattern. One of its earliest and most characteristic treatments, however, occurs in a film that many see as the prototype for the genre, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis.* The modeling of the heroine Maria into a destructive android look-alike serves as the narrative's centerpiece and prompts its greatest display of scientific gadgetry—that which we have come to expect to be the very core of the science fiction film. Visually indistinguishable from the real Maria, the android threatens to unleash dangerous desires in the human community and thus bring about disaster. Because she is both alluring and potentially destructive, the artificial Maria well represents the disturbing implications of that capacity for doubling and artifice which man's science has attained.

Probably the landmark treatment of this doubling motif occurs in the original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* which focuses precisely upon a threatening possibility for perfectly duplicating the human body, "cell for cell, atom for atom," as one character explains. In this case, it is an alien life form that uses nature wrongly, to grow seed pods which will deprive man of his own true nature, as they duplicate his body, "snatch" his intellect, but deprive him of all emotional capacity. While films had previously presented such duplication as a threat, the product of human aberrance or some misguided science, *Invasion* added a disconcerting note and also laid open

a desire which has frequently moved just beneath the surface of these films, by pointing up a subtle attraction at the heart of the doubling process. The bloodless victory of the copy, of the pods, is actually lauded by those who have been subsumed into this emotionless community. This reaction suggests an elemental desire in man for the security and tranquility which the sameness of duplication promises; as another character notes, this transformation permits man to be "born into an untroubled world" and to abdicate from the many problems of modern life—problems posed, it is implied, by the very advances of science, especially in the field of warfare, which, on the surface, usually seem a basic concern of these films.

Don Siegel, director of the original *Invasion,* admits that he sought to inject this challenge of attractiveness in response to a widespread desire he noted to abdicate from human responsibility in the face of an increasingly complex and confusing modern world. To this end he

> purposely had the prime spokesman for the pods be a pod psychiatrist. He speaks with authority, knowledge. He really believes that being a pod is preferable to being a frail, frightened human who cares. He has a strong case for being a pod. How marvelous it would be if you were a cow and all you had to do is munch a little grass and not worry about life, death and pain. There's a strong case for being a pod.[2]

It is this "strong case" that has been repeatedly and increasingly stated in films since the time of *Invasion. The Stepford Wives,* for instance, plays not just upon the threat of a gradual, insidious replacement of the women in a small town by mindless, dispassionate androids—apparently the perfect housewife—but also on the terror implicit in their similarity to what is held up as a cultural ideal and in the fact that this duplication is obviously desirable to those closest to the women, their own husbands. Perhaps because of our increasing concern with the potential for cloning and genetic research, such possibilities no longer seem so far-fetched, hence the recent spate of films exploring this complex proposition. They all emphasize man's fascination with knowledge and science, as has always been typical of the genre, but they link a single-

INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

minded pursuit of knowledge with that disconcerting desire to duplicate the self—or unleash the unknown power of duplication, as in *The Thing*—and its consequent rendering of the self almost irrelevant. In sum, they suggest how the human penchant for artifice —that is, for analyzing, understanding, and synthesizing all things, even man himself—seems to promise a reduction of man to no more than artifice.

This paradox also sheds some light on a subtle distinction which the science fiction film has typically sought to make in its depiction of man's attitudes towards science. As critics have frequently noted, the genre often seems to juxtapose a good and a bad science, white and black magic, as it were, with the one working to serve man and the other to threaten his position in the world. We might recall the novel *Frankenstein*'s subtitle, *The Modern Prometheus,* for it can help us to discern an even more telling distinction at work in the film genre. In its recurring manifestations, the doubling motif denotes a Faustian drive for knowledge or power, a dangerous and even self-destructive impulse behind that fascination with the power of science or some select knowledge to enable man to duplicate himself artificially. This Faustian impulse, however, typically tries to go masked as a Promethean one, that is, as a desire to bestow significant boons upon man. Of course, it is in the nature of those boons—not light but likeness, and not the potential of fire but its destructive force—that we eventually perceive the Faustian persona beneath the Promethean seeming that science and the scientist usually bear in the genre.

Why this seeming, however, and why should its ultimate expression take the very shape of seeming, namely the doubling or copying of the self? The persistence of this theme hints at a certain hubris of the mind with which the genre is concerned: a pride in a science which is seen as seeking to accommodate all things to the self, ultimately even the self which, because of a lingering Cartesian dualism between the mind and body, thinking and feeling, has become associated with both the internal life of the mind and an external world of otherness, the not-mind.[3] The fashioning of other bodies, other forms of the self, only reinforces that split between mind and body and reasserts the hegemony of the former over the latter. What I would like to suggest, following Arendt's lead, then, is that we might see in this doubling motif the indication of a science turned inside out, a drive for knowledge and control become a desire for oblivion, although it is a blind desire, as the self unwittingly turns upon itself, even while apparently engaged in a process of valorizing the self through the ability for replication.

The full paradox and threat inherent in this artificing of life lurks just beneath the surface of a film like *Alien*. In fact, the film's central horror, a monstrous presence that thrives on man, yet is apparently invulnerable to his normal defenses, seems metaphoric of some flaw within man, perhaps the Faustian drive that increasingly seeks expression. The murderous alien is brought into the spaceship because the company sponsoring the flight has established a primary directive for the crew to gather any information on life forms that might prove valuable. Arguing for this directive, and thus directly precipitating the alien's murderous rampage among the crew, is an android, a replica of man so perfect that he fools his fellow crewmembers. A perfect example of the danger behind this doubling pattern, he has been programmed to ensure the mission's knowledge-gathering activities, regardless of any danger which might accrue to the human component of the expedition. In the film's most startling scene, the alien creature that has embedded itself within one of the crew members suddenly bursts through his chest, killing the human host. Born from within man, this creature metaphorically embodies the monstrous potential of the double which has made its life possible. In short, the alien represents the displaced terror and true frightening aspect of that desire for knowledge which, also arising from within man, has begun to produce life-threatening doubles. It is only through this perspective of displacement that the complex plotting of *Alien,* and especially the discomfiting relationship between android and monster, comes into proper focus. In his discussion of the nature of man's proclivity for doubles, René Girard predicts just such a link and connects the desire for doubling to man's most violent impulses; as he notes, there is "no double who does not yield a monstrous aspect upon close scrutiny."[4]

The new version of *The Thing* specifically emphasizes this "close scrutiny," that is, the visual problem posed by the double. When a scientific research team stumbles upon and accidentally unthaws an alien creature embedded in the polar ice for thousands of years, they unleash not simply a monstrous creature, one that threatens those discoverers, but a figure that seems to summarize the problems of doubling located in both *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Alien*. As one character notes, this creature "wants to hide inside an imitation" and it possesses the power to "shape its own cells to imitate" any other being in its environment. That this capacity for perfect mimesis is not simply a protective mechanism, like a chameleon's color adaptation, but a very real threat to man is underscored by the gruesome scenes of possession and transformation for which the film has been scored on occasion. In fact, *The Thing* seems to draw on *Alien*'s "chest-buster" sequence as a model for these scenes—a connection which underscores the importance I have here attached to that previous scene and one which hints at an internal component in this alien doubling. What *The Thing* particularly adds to the previous formulations of this doubling motif is an emphasis on the contagiousness of this tendency, and thus its more than individual menace. As the doctor among the group calculates, at its current rate of assimilation of man, the alien polymorph could take over all of humanity in "27,000 hours from first contact." It thereby threatens rapidly to reduce man's world to a realm of imitations, to make everyone simply an extension of that alien presence.

With the awareness of this threatening possibility, an equally devastating potential also emerges, one which inheres in every act of doubling. Because man is possessed of an absolute desire for certainty or knowledge—at least, so the science fiction genre argues through its emphasis on the compulsion for knowledge—he can easily become prey to an almost debilitating anxiety in the face of whatever stubbornly resists his attempts at formulation. And when the enigma is his own double or potential double, the anxiety may take even deeper root. Almost frantically, therefore, the men at this isolated outpost reach out for some answer, some assurance, even "some kind of test," as one of them puts it, which might detect this alien presence in their midst and thus assure them that they are all just what they appear to be, truly men. Significantly, however, this task of detection and inquiry into the visible world quickly transforms into a suspicion of the human society in which they are immersed, even an uneasiness about the self; as one man asks, "how do we know who's human?" It is a question that betrays a deep-seated fear, normally kept hidden yet essentially commonplace, of all that is not the self. Calling attention to this rapid breakdown of human society which the alien visitation has precipitated, McReady notes that "Nobody trusts anybody now." What such a comment also bears witness to is an alien potential which resides in man, ever ready to be triggered by circumstance and to raise a disturbing suspicion not only about one's fellow man, but even about the self and its relationship to that human world it must inhabit.

What *The Thing* locates, therefore, is a certain *thing*-ness within man, an absence or potential abdication from the human world which can only be made present or visualized in the mirror furnished by the doubling process. The confrontation with which the film ends, as McReady and a black man, the only other survivor of the group, eye each other suspiciously, each equally sure that the other is only a double fashioned by the alien, metaphorically points up the distrust and fear which already typically mark modern society, and particularly its race relations. Of course, the doubling process which the alien initiated promised to render everyone the same, each an extension of that single intruder, and in their mutual fear of the other McReady and his comrade have already fulfilled that promise after a fashion. Moreover, that threat precipitates with both men a retreat into the private space of the mind, the one stable ground upon which they feel they can still stand. In effect, the mind is thus seen as the true repository of the self, protectively questioning all about, while asserting with ever decreasing conviction one's own humanity, as we have already seen McReady doing. If that phrase, "I know I'm human," seems to ring hollow, it is because the narrative, through its visitation of this disconcerting doubling, has managed to undercut all certainty, all dependable knowledge, certainly all reliance on appearance. Consequently, at the film's conclusion even we are unsure if one or neither of the survivors is indeed a copy, just waiting his chance to spread his mimetic reign into the outside world. Indeed, we are left to question the very future of man's life on earth, just as Arendt does.

In another sort of investigation into the nature of our modern culture, Loren Eisely has attempted to trace out the process by which "man becomes natural," that is, how he came to see himself as a part of nature and its historical processes, rather than as a strange occurrence and an intrusion into the natural world. "Before life could be viewed as in any way natural," he explains, "a rational explanation of change through the ages" was needed[5]; man had to acquire a thorough knowledge of the patterns of evolution. The recent film *Blade Runner* dramatizes the logical consequences of this mastery of evolutionary principles. The development of this understanding, the film suggests, serves as the springboard for the current concern with the possibilities of genetic engineering, which, in its turn, has generated a potential for scientifically controlled evolution: the creation and programming of perfect replicas of man, gifted with unusual beauty, strength, or intelligence, and made to serve their human creators. As a result of this original step in "becoming natural," however, apparently something has also been lost. As Eiseley points out, while "man has, in scientific terms, become natural . . . the nature of his 'naturalness' escapes him. Perhaps his human freedom has left him

the difficult choice of determining what it is in his nature to be."[6] The problematic nature of human nature is precisely the topic on which *Blade Runner* with its formulation of the doubling motif attempts to shed some light.

As in *The Thing,* a sense of uncertainty and the anxiety which attends it seem to color the very world of *Blade Runner* and to derive in large part from the fascination with doubling which it chronicles. The futuristic environment the film describes seems perpetually dark and rainy, as gloomy as that of film noir —the conventions of which *Blade Runner* does in fact draw on. In this bleak atmosphere we can see mirrored an interior darkness that afflicts the characters here and seems brought on by the problems arising from a culture practically predicated upon the possibilities of duplication. In this future world, man has progressed to such a point that he can genetically design and reproduce virtually anything that lives; thus we see mechanical birds, snakes, dogs, and especially people—or "replicants," as they are here termed—all of which are virtually indistinguishable from the real thing. They have been fashioned by man's science in order to satisfy his various desires, to free him from labor and the dangers of combat, or simply to amuse him. And yet in spite of these benefits, no one seems truly happy in this society; in fact, those who can do so readily abandon this world in favor of one of the "off-world colonies," doubles of the earth itself which, like so many of the copies here, are apparently perceived as being better than their original. We thus see a vision of man not only no longer at home with himself, but no longer at home with his home; and the human doubles promise to increase the level of anxiety by refusing to remain in their servile roles and demanding instead a life like that of their creators and models.

As is typically the case in the science fiction genre, then, a kind of monstrous creation has transpired, but it has gone masked as scientific advance. In the place of Frankenstein are two geneticists—Dr. Tyrell, master designer of replicants, and J. F. Sebastian, his chief genetic engineer. Both appear to have given that Promethean impulse free reign, pushing the desire to fashion a copy of man to its extreme in their specially designed androids for every task and every distraction. The ostensible project of providing for human needs, however, has clearly been submerged by a pride in the process of doubling itself. Tyrell, it seems, is moved solely by his fascination with creating ever more perfect copies, replicants which can defy those tests for humanity which have developed in this future world—just as *The Thing* predicts. And with the girl Rachael, whom he addresses at one point as "my child," he has nearly succeeded. Sebastian has turned his engineering skills to no less subjective end, the task of filling his lonely life with manufactured "friends," albeit small, misshapen, flawed figures—apparently various reflections of his own flawed body, which suffers from "premature decrepitude." In sum, these scientists have turned their capacities for creating copies to their own ends, and in the process have endowed their creations with a certain reflexive capacity, Tyrell's figures mirroring his own desire for perfection, beauty, and transcendence of mechanical limitation, Sebastian's reflecting not only his own defects, but also his flawed view of himself.

In these projections of the self, moreover, both have already created the conditions that must eventually render them irrelevant. Because they have programmed their replicant creations with memories of a life that never was—even providing them with photographs of supposed relations and friends—and thus tried to convince them of their humanity, these engineers have erected a potentially dangerous bridge between the human and android realms. In fact, they have succeeded too well, for they have unleashed a synthetic but powerful desire for real life, one which—as is the case in films like *Frankenstein, Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* and *The Thing*—initially places itself in opposition to the possessors of normal life, mankind. In attempting to return to Earth from the off-world colonies, the group of replicants with whom the narrative is concerned have already killed 23 humans; and after finding their way back, they predictably turn their attention to their creators, particularly Tyrell and Sebastian. What they quest for is the secret of their programmed lives, and particularly, after the fashion of men through the ages, the means to a longer life. In effect, they have embarked on a Pro-

methean search of sorts, seeking the archetypal fire of life itself, but in that murderous trail they leave behind, we see the clearest signs of that violence which, as René Girard has noted, usually goes masked by the doubling process.[7]

An even more telling measure of the ambiguity which attaches to this doubling process is found in the absence of a sure anchor for our own sympathies in this situation. That is, in the absence of the more typical monstrous presence and as a natural outgrowth of the desire for a nearly perfect mimesis which has produced these doubles, our concern shifts uneasily about between the world-weary, alienated bounty hunter Rick Deckard and those replicants whom it is his task to hunt down and destroy. Another and equally compelling reason for these shifting sympathies, of course, is that, as we quickly recognize, both man and android here essentially share the same—a doubled—fate. Like Sebastian, the replicants suffer from their own form of premature decrepitude, a programmed mortality which ensures their inevitable death after four years of service. As a consequence, these androids face the same sort of disconcerting knowledge that man has always had to abide with, that of an inescapable and onrushing death. Fed up with his work as a bounty killer, meanwhile, Deckard meditates on the nature of his quarry and, in turn, begins to wonder about his own place in this confusing welter of being wherein everything, perhaps even himself, seems to have its double or be itself a copy. Thus he comments at one point, "Replicants weren't supposed to have feelings; neither were blade runners" like himself. It is a complex mirroring pattern which has resulted from the doubling process, as men and androids begin to see themselves in each other and, discomfitingly, prod the others into a questioning of their very nature.

In the character of Rachael, Tyrell's nearly perfect replicant, this increasingly blurred distinction between man and the copies with which he has become obsessed finds its clearest example. Accepting the testimony of his own experienced eye, Deckard is initially fooled into believing her human, and he finds himself mysteriously attracted to her. What is more unsettling is that his fascination continues even after he administers the Voight-Kampff Empathy Test which reveals that she is a

The replicant Rachael in BLADE RUNNER

replicant. The precise meaning of those test results quickly seems to evaporate in light of Rachael's manifest "humanity," however: her love of music, desire for affection, concern for others, and apparently a love for Deckard. Her response to the test's conclusions, asking Deckard, "Did you ever take that test yourself?" only compounds his quandary; it causes him to reflect on his own humanity, on the nature, that is, of a hired killer. As a result of this reflection, the subsequent order to kill Rachael along with the other replicants prompts a marked shift in the blade runner's attitude, a questioning of that which usually goes unquestioned, namely the humanity of those who create—and destroy—these artificial lives. He thus refuses the order and instead runs off with her to spend whatever little time her short, engineered life leaves them together in a different world, as a last shot indicates, a realm of light, greenery, and life, rather than the dark, rainy cityscape which has produced them both. In effect, Deckard takes Arendt's warning to heart, abandoning "the human artifice of the world"

in favor of a natural environment in which man might regain his truly human nature.

If it seems ironic that a replicant or double should provide the stimulus for such an awakening to the self and a proper sense of humanity, it may be a telling indication of how far modern man has come in his fascination with artifice and how much he has lost in exchange for that knowledge of how to double the self. No longer viewed simply as the abnormal desire of aberrant types, as in the numerous films which have focused on mad scientist types, doubling has here become the very hallmark of society, something its members take for granted—but like many things we take for granted, it is also a pernicious influence. As *Blade Runner* suggests, when this abiding fascination with doubling becomes a dominant force in man's life, he clearly runs the risk of becoming little more than a copy himself, potentially less human than the very images he has fashioned in his likeness. Man's scientific advances, in sum, threaten to render him largely irrelevant, save as an empty pattern within which knowledge might be stored and through which it might extend its grasp, further increase its capacities, and expand the realm of artifice.

At another level we should find it most fitting that a double should spur an awakening to a sense of self. In essence, another form of the doppelgänger archetype, the replicant might be expected to serve the sort of salutary function that other archetypal patterns do. In explaining the effect of archetypal images on the psyche, psychologist James Hillman notes that "reversion through likeness, resemblance," affords the mind "a bridge . . . a method which connects an event to its image, a psychic process to its myth, a suffering of the soul to the imaginal mystery expressed therein."[8] In such "resemblance," he claims, there is located a path to a psychic truth which we have forgotten or lost sight of amid the welter of modern-day experience. Because of its reflective dimension, then, the image of the double, android, replicant, or copy holds out a great promise, even as it seems rather threatening, for it carries the potential of bringing us back to ourselves, making us at home with the self and the natural world almost in spite of ourselves. We might view the combat between Deckard and the android Roy Batty in exactly this context. In the middle of their fight, Deckard slips from the top of a building and dangles precariously in the air; only the outstretched hand of Batty, grabbing Deckard at the last moment, stops his fall and brings him back from the brink of death to a possible life. It is precisely the sort of saving potential or "reversion" which always inheres in the image of the double and which may ultimately best explain the continuing fascination it holds for us.

In attempting to map out the large territory of fantasy narratives, Tzvetan Todorov identifies a singular tension at work in the form which reflects the fundamental experience of its audience. Both reader (or viewer) and protagonist, he asserts, "must decide if a certain event or phenomenon belongs to reality or to imagination, that is, must determine whether or not it is real. It is therefore the category of the real which has furnished a basis for our definition."[9] As a result of this indeterminacy, we experience "a certain hesitation" as we try to "place" the events of the narrative within a known field of personal experience or reservoir of knowledge, just as the story's characters do. In this moment of hesitation, we should be able to discern the problem of representation which lies at the genre's very core, for we hesitate because of an immediate challenge to our usual system of referents, the stock of images which lived experience normally affords. At the same time, of course, that hesitation achieves a valuable purpose in prompting this stock-taking and thus starting a most subtle reflective experience.

In its recurrent concern with a doubling motif, the science fiction film thus draws on one of the fantastic's deepest structural patterns. In those images which fall outside of our normal lexicon, the film genre admits to a mystery or enigma that is at its center; and in bracketing the image of man—through those copies or replicants—within this enigmatic category, it admits of a puzzle to which we too are a part. Even as it limns the progress or potential of science, reason, and knowledge, therefore, the genre also acknowledges an underlying mystery and ambiguity, certainly in the approximations with which our mimetic impulse has always had to content itself. The fact that these disconcerting copies are in our own shape reminds us how little science has

yet learned of substance about man, how little, in essence, we know about the most alluring of models for mimesis. As Arendt noted—and as our accomplishments in genetic engineering every day point up—we already possess the potential which science fiction films have so frequently described, that for crafting artificial versions of man. What these films hope to forestall is the dark obverse of this capacity, that for making human nature artificial as well.

NOTES

1. *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 2.

2. Quoted by Stuart Kaminsky in *Don Siegel: Director* (New York: Curtis Books, 1974), p. 104.

3. For a more detailed discussion of this split between the rational and sensory or emotional aspects of man, see Vivian Sobchak's *The Limits of Infinity* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1980), and Lane Roth's "The Rejection of Rationalism in Recent Science Fiction Films," *Philosophy in Context,* 11 (1981), 42–55.

4. *Violence and the Sacred,* trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977), p. 160. As Girard notes elsewhere, "mimetic desire cannot be let loose without breeding a midsummer night of jealousy and strife," "Myth and Ritual in Shakespeare," in *Textual Strategies,* ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979), p. 192.

5. *The Firmament of Time* (New York: Atheneum, 1966), p. 72.

6. *The Firmament of Time,* p. 114.

7. In addition to *Violence and the Sacred,* see Girard's *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel,* trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1966).

8. *The Dream and the Underworld* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 4.

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Editor's Notebook (continued)

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Camus once said something to the effect that we should act so that, if everyone followed our example, it would prepare a decent future. We urge our loyal readers to remember that photocopying is not a trivial act. It has substantial economic consequences. More serious, perhaps, is what *sub rosa* copying teaches by example and implication: that journals are expendable. —E.C.

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Reviews

ATOMIC CAFE

Produced and directed by Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty, and Pierce Rafferty. Music coordinator: Rick Eaker. Distributor: Archives Project, Inc., Box 438, Canal Street Station, New York, NY 10013.

Near the beginning of *Atomic Cafe*—a compilation film composed entirely of clips from 1940s–50s sources—a TV news reporter describes Julius and Ethel Rosenberg's last moments. With averted eyes and melodramatic pauses, the reporter hints at being overcome with emotion at the horror and gravity of the moment he is describing. An actor's craft builds us up to the punchline about Ethel Rosenberg "finally going to meet her maker—(beat) —she'll have a lot of explaining to do . . ."

This scene and the entire Rosenbergs sequence represents one example of the subtlety and levels of resonance carefully pieced together by the editors (Jayne Loader and Kevin Rafferty, who are also, along with Pierce Rafferty, the film's producer/directors) of *Atomic Cafe.* The (offscreen) cloud of smoke arising from Rosenberg's head after she is electrocuted makes a macabre metaphor for the film's entire set of preoccupations: the mushroom cloud hanging over us all; threat of horrible death; pathological anti-communism of the period; the power of the authorities; and the human beings (s)trapped at the center of it all. The principal message is, *imagine yourself during a nuclear war.* Somberly accom-

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ANDROIDS SHOOTING STARS

ATOMIC CAFE *DIVA*

SPRING 1983 $2.50

panied by music appropriate to tragedy, the sequence ends in a brand-new GI Bill suburb, tract homes unrolling, box after box, like plaster vegetables just sprouted from the soil. The shot is taken from a car, while the car radio announces the Rosenbergs' deaths. Our postwar working class sprinkles its lawn and sleeps. The sequence is a brilliant, stark comment on the lack of mass resistance in this country to nuclear madness and McCarthyism —brilliant and stark enough to drive almost anybody to a cynicism and despair matching the film-makers'.

In fact, *Atomic Cafe*'s cynicism is both the strong and weak point of the film. It works for the humor, and unifies the narrative in the absence of any voice-over; but it militates against political explanation of what happened during the Cold War. Cynicism runs like an alternating current through the narrative, turning horror and black humor on its pivot. This viewpoint is excellent for exposing the lies of authorities, as well as for providing a psychological bulwark against the threat of nuclear annihilation. But the film starts out, stays, and ends there. The laughs keep coming because the creativity of the period's ideological apologists—combined with the patient archival work of the film-makers—is seemingly endless. For example, an animated cartoon, its expressionist design and anti-intellectualism typical of the period, pits a "Professor Egghead"-type against an "Average Joe" afflicted with "nuclearosis," or obsessional fear of the bomb. The professor kindly explains that it's all in Joe's mind, and his symptoms disappear. At another point in *Atomic Cafe,* George Putnam (a right-wing fixture in LA broadcasting for decades) unwinds an anticommunist diatribe, and smoothly segues into the revelation that it is being brought to you by two new LA shopping malls. They become the summary argument of his picture of capitalism versus socialism: the marketplace of plenty, with lots of free parking.

But these laughs are a sure thing, like shooting a sitting duck-and-cover. The audience for *Atomic Cafe* is pretty clearly defined as hip and leftish, leaning towards jaded and punk. The film-makers, heavily reliant on associative montage, accede to the temptation to milk the considerable possibilities for a psychological humor, at the expense of drawing historical lessons—without which, cynicism seeps into place as the ideological cement of the film.

The structure of compilation film-making reverberates with what the human mind does all the time, especially while dreaming: piecing together disparate bits of information, images, fragments of conversation, etc., according to a previously unconscious organizing principle based in their common elements. The worldview of *Atomic Cafe*'s film-makers runs along these lines of least resistance.

Made entirely from already existing footage, compilation films represent one of the "purest" and most underutilized of film forms. Through this type of film-making cinema can celebrate the resurrection of its history at the same time as something fresh is created. A clear sense of tone and ideological direction is crucial to producing a unified film, in any case; for compilation films there is literally no other course open. The Raffertys and Loader hold steadily throughout the film to their vision of how these images connect into a multi-laned highway to the Cold War. Only found footage from the mid-40s to the mid-50s is used, along with sound of the same vintage. There is no voice-over narration. The materials are so rich that *Atomic Cafe* can afford to be rigorous in adhering to its predefined limits.

The internal logic of the nuclear dream is reproduced in the narrative structure of the film. Throughout, the threat of finding ourselves caught in a nuclear holocaust hovers just beyond the words and images, waiting in the wings—just as it does in real life. Finally, as if in answer to our unspoken and unconscious demand to get it over with, the end of the film gives us the cathartic moment: we are under nuclear attack (skillfully culled from B-Hollywood and military training films), and an animated world lights up with colorful mushrooms, seen from outer space.

The film works best at a political level when it strips away the self-congratulatory or pious veneer of the period's military men, cold war politicians, and religious pseudo-moralists. It shows that in this period (1945–1955) the lines between these types of people kept blurring. We see Truman, caught grinning by the news cameras before he was on the air, adjust his expression in record time to global-important solemnity, and proceed to reveal that God

gave *us* the bomb, and He'll help *us* to use it wisely. We see men of the cloth musing over military tactics within the bomb shelter—should we let outsiders in if we are in a small shelter? It would be good to keep a gun handy for such situations . . .

What emerges clearly is that the dominant ideology of Cold War America was equal parts religious, militaristic, and anti-communist—ingredients adeptly shuffled to meet the needs of the moment for the country's rulers. And within this tri-partite arrangement, what the film might be said to identify as "the culture of the bomb" found a nurturing environment, spawning all the big cars, drive-ins, suburbs, patriarchal family relations, bomb shelters, and TVs that it required in order to flourish.

But a large post-Watergate/Vietnam/Three Mile Island public already knows today that government, the military, and big business lie whenever they feel it necessary. Does being caught lying over and over again like naughty children punish Nixon, Eisenhower and their friends? Does it teach us anything new about their *raison d'état*? Or, since they become clowns, does it relieve us of the responsibility to be scared?

These American notables of the not-so-distant past stand accused by *Atomic Cafe* of producing the nightmare/dream material from which the film was finally dreamt and fashioned thirty years later. That this *was* criminal behavior is amply demonstrated by the film-makers. Although all of its footage had already been put in the can, this film couldn't have been made in 1955. The perspective was lacking—a 70s irony and distance—to edit the material into this particular dream. The trouble is that the dreams of the Nixons and McCarthys were attached to the levers of power in the real world. Their cynicism may be exposed by rearranging images of policies they inspired or carried out. But a left-cynicism can't respond in kind: worldviews, by themselves, don't punish anybody.

Yet in another sense worldview (what is it made of, who does it affect) is finally what this complex film is about. Watching *Atomic Cafe* is a little like looking at home movies of the country. Again and again we are shown "nuclear" families—pipe-smoking fathers, sewing mothers, homework-beset kids—in

American family wins nuclear war: ATOMIC CAFE

their living room, watching TV after dinner, enjoying their hard-earned reward after the long day: a reward which was nothing else but the very activity of being that American family. Toward the end of the film, after the nuclear attack is "over," the family stands in yet another living room, this one strewn with a surprisingly minimal amount of debris. Father asks the kids to clean up the glass. He exudes reassurance, and tells them to relax until they hear from the authorities. A different actor portrays father here. But he remains the same kind, patriarchal figure we have seen several times earlier.

The film does this well. It dissects the period's cultural mythologies by substituting elements of equal value. It illustrates underlying assumptions of the culture-makers, if not the entire culture, by repeating enough of their recurrent imagery to make the patterns clear. And the film-makers expand upon this initial insight, drawing from their materials mutually reinforcing messages that lead us to a picture of larger social structures.

For instance, Eisenhower is very much the father himself, comforting, protecting, explaining. During his commonsense, eloquent speech, he gently warns that, although we are the greatest producers in the world, here in the USA technology threatens to outrun our moral understanding of how to use it wisely. This folksy lecture is delivered beneath images of kids in cars at drive-ins at dusk, night falling as they munch burgers and fries. He is speaking of the bomb, of course. But the images give his words another meaning—that the entire culture is warped by technical ad-

vancement when technology is combined with the most vulgar of materialisms as its guiding philosophy.

In sequences such as these, consisting of deceptively easy-looking combinations of found materials (including marvelous use of popular songs with nuclear themes), *Atomic Cafe* reaches the level of poetry, simultaneously elevating the images and sound-overs to a formal beauty while jarring the audience with a punk-like exaggerated mock-worship of 50s culture. The film-makers demand some work from their audience. But the type of work they demand raises questions about *their* worldview, and their ultimate purposes in making this intriguing film.

For instance, during the 1950s the Army conducted above-ground A-bomb testing with more or less unprotected soldiers close to ground zero, and filmed the soldiers in trenches wearing dark glasses and plugging their ears with fingers. *Paul Jacobs and the Nuclear Gang,* an earlier antinuclear documentary, explored the incidents, government/military cover-ups, and what happened to the soldiers twenty years later (leukemia). *Atomic Cafe* shows the same footage, what the authorities told the people ("if you follow orders there's no danger"), and grabbing an easy laugh, moves on.

Now, not all films should attempt to address everyone. *Atomic Cafe* works in large part because it knows its audience, and because the rules it plays by correspond to the relatively sophisticated sensibilities of this group. But what is particularly disturbing about the politics of *Atomic Cafe* is that, even within its self-imposed aesthetic, opportunities have not been utilized to offer some images of hope.

Few glimpses are provided, for example, of the lonely fighters against the madness. During the Rosenbergs sequence a clip of a pro-Rosenberg demonstration, lasting a few seconds, is overshadowed immediately by longer and more sensational clips of "patriotic" citizens calling for their death. Footage of Henry Wallace's ill-fated Progressive Party of 1948, which won over a million votes for its too-little too-late Popular Front/New Deal platform, could have likewise lent some sense that not *everyone* living at the time was completely nuts. (See, by way of contrast, the recent documentary on The Weavers, *Wasn't That a Time?,* which successfully does just that.)

Since the film-makers only allow themselves to use materials prepared by the advertisers, commercial film producers, military propagandists, Catholic Manicheans—in short, the ideologists of Cold War America—the dream-world constructed by splicing their visions together reflects what those ideologists saw, and only signals us as to what is missing by the editorial tone. The tone, it is true, is consistent. It unifies the film. But let's remember the subject matter here: atomic madness, which raises a political and moral question. Is cynicism the proper response to the possibility of nuclear annihilation?

There is something a bit too smug in the relentless indictment of the Cold War worldview and its typical imagery. Especially since the indicting remains finally a prisoner of the images: although the film manages to bash cracks all along the faultlines of this strange ideology, it never breaks through to something else. We are left with the puncturing of the *internal* contradictions of this barrage of propaganda and its images. The nightmare remains, relieved only by an ironic self-consciousness that we children, born and raised beneath its shadows, know better than our gullible mothers and fathers. And this is not enough.

—FRED GLASS

DIVA

Director: Jean-Jacques Beneix. Script: Beneix and Jean Van Hamme. Producer: Irene Silberman. Photography: Philippe Rousselot. Music: Vladimir Kosma. United Artists Classics.

Jean-Jacques Beineix's *Diva* has been viewed by most as a beautiful film that is subtly entertaining in part because of its delightful visual jokes and references to film and media culture. Some critics have suggested that it should be approached as a metafilm: a self-delighting visual space that goes beyond mimeticity and uses the realistic details required by its plot as a mere "excuse to have fun making a movie" (*New York,* April 18, 1982). Emphasizing the "enlightened playfulness" of the film, at least one critic has attempted to make it into an apolitical statement depicting a "hedonist trapped in a world politicized to the extreme" (*New York Review of Books,* May 27, 1982).

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This is not the place to discuss the poetics and politics of metafilm, but since a metafilmic vocabulary and frame have become more common in discussing films similar to *Diva,* it might be helpful to point out that there is a radical difference between a film that merely quotes from previous visual texts and thus desediments the quoted images and releases new, often parodic meanings in them, and those films that aim at exploring the filmicity of film and thus their own status as film. *Diva* is not interested in any sustained discussion of its own mode of being as a film. And even if it were a metafilm, such a self-reflexivity by no means would imply that the visual space of the film lies beyond ideology; ideology is the condition of meaning and communication in all discourses, and metafilms are no exception to the ideological implications of discursive practices. But judging from various commentaries, *Diva* has indeed succeeded in creating the illusion that it is a film without troubling contents. It is, according to another critic, "the most purely pleasurable movie," full of "visual wit and style" and on the whole a "kind of noir fairy tale" (*The Village Voice,* April 20, 1982).

Interrogation of the film, however, reveals the ideology inscribed in this "witty" visual space to be a profoundly disturbing statement about the contemporary crisis in the relationship between men and women in the West and the transgressions it causes. The film is committed to the ideal of the sovereign (male) self and its free and unencumbered growth through emotional, intellectual and aesthetic fulfillment —all presented as universal and thus transcultural values. The world, events and other people are seen as occasions for self-accomplishment; the story of the film and its abundant narrative energies are in fact generated by the search for moments of self-enhancement on the part of the protagonists who seemingly are struggling with the contemporary world in which individualism and private spaces have lost their values. The contradictions repressed in such a liberal humanist view of the self and its connection with others are so overwhelming, however, that the film, which ostensibly sets out to support such an ideology by dramatizing it, becomes in actuality not so much an affirmation of liberalism but a demystification of the very philosophical grounds upon which it is founded. In order for the central male characters, Jules and Gorodish, to achieve self-governing and fulfilling independence through emotional encounters and aesthetic knowledge, they have to negate the very principles of liberalism that authorize their search and their world view.

Wilhelminia Wiggins Fernandez in DIVA

The current crisis in the relationship between men and women in the West (a mode of relating that is part of a larger view of an imperial self and its relations to the world outside) is foregrounded in recent years partly because of the rapid shifting of patterns of behavior under new social forces. The traditional codes of connection in male-female relationships have been decentered and Western women are no longer a mere actant of men's erotic and domestic fantasies. As a result Western man has had to search for this lost center (so necessary for orienting his sense of self and emotional well-being) somewhere else. As *Diva* clearly indicates, the new search for an erotic and emotive center, following a rather familiar pattern in Western history, has led to the emotional and sexual colonialization of the dark woman: a capitulatory relation that deprives the non-Western woman of the very self-sovereignty for which Gorodish and Jules strive. Beneath the playful and glitting surfaces of *Diva,* the calm zen-like gestures of

I am thankful to Téresa Ebert for discussing the film with me and reading this essay before publication.

Gorodish and the innocent-looking face of Jules lie a deep, untamable aggression and emotional cruelty. The film is an allegory of what Cynthia, the film's "black American Diva," calls "un viol" (a rape) of the dark woman by the Western man who no longer can unleash his erotic fantasies upon the contemporary Western woman.

On the surface, *Diva* evolves around a complicated plot consisting of a double chase. In the rather intricate interstices of these chases, however, quietly and perniciously a third chase takes place that, like the first two, aims at restoring the lost state of affairs. The overt chases of the film are about the destiny of two voices: both private voices that should not be made public. If the Taiwanese record pirates get hold of the tape of Cynthia's rendition of Catalani's *La Wally* (made surreptitiously by Jules), her aesthetic purity and performative integrity will be violated, and she will be reduced to a mere commercial property and descend to the rank of a popular singer. ("Vous me prenez pour les Beatles?") She is the dark singer who refuses the status of "celebrity," believing in the totality of the performative situation. The "publication" of the second taped voice is also equally ruinous of a career. This is a tape made by a white prostitute, Nadia, recounting the crimes of the chief of police who, along with a private army of thugs, is involved in prostitution rings, drug trafficking and murder.

Alongside these two actual chases, a third chase takes place in the film. In this one the searchers also struggle to retrieve something lost that is of vital importance: the old erotic order and lost ideal of womanhood and femininity Jules and Gorodish need for their own sense of masculinity and self-development. This search, however, is equated in the film with the search for spontaneity, poeticity and affirmation of the right of the individual to shape his life and world according to his desires. Unlike the first two chases, this search takes place not on the streets of Paris, but in the dark interiors of quiet lofts; the awesome inside of a lighthouse; the dreamy terrain of a "fairy tale" told over the telephone, and in the textuality of surrealistic jokes. The object of this search is a woman(hood) tantalizingly placed on the moving boundaries of the figure of nurturing mother and seductive mistress. This peculiar combination, in which woman is projected as a self-negating person, requires for its existence social arrangements that are already being displaced in the West. To a very large extent the Western woman, in comparison to the Eastern woman, refuses to respond to such an image of herself projected by male fantasies rooted in cultural images generated by the old social order. The white European male is thus forced to go outside contemporary Europe in order to find a woman who is vulnerable. The rejected white man in *Diva,* however, revenges himself by punishing the white woman throughout—presenting her as self-absorbed, insensitive, inhumanly efficient and, on the whole, non-sexual.

The first European woman the film focuses on is Nadia, a prostitute who is fleeing from being forcibly kept as the chief of police's mistress. Before being murdered by his henchmen, she conceals in the mailpouch of Jules's moped a tape cassette recording her miseries and revealing the crimes of the chief of police. Nadia is the white woman as burden—by dropping the "burden" of her confession on Jules, she pits him against the corrupt forces and sets in motion their nearly fatal pursuit of him. Barefoot and barely clothed, Nadia is a "professional" woman stripped of all womanly qualities. The blonde policewoman, Paula, is also a "professional." Although in her professional capacity she saves Jules in his loft and protects him from his adversaries, she only partly succeeds as the redeeming woman. She is the meddling, punishing mother who takes care of Jules only as part of preserving her own image. She is, significantly, indifferent to sensuality and uninterested in touching and contact. While on a stake-out with her partner, who brags about his athletic prowess as a runner and somewhat facetiously invites her to feel his leg muscles, she becomes nervous and refuses. The other white women presented in the film do not fare any better: all are presented as lacking spontaneity and warmth. In one of the chase scenes a wounded Jules fleeing his pursuers takes shelter in a video-games arcade. Bleeding from a wound and almost losing consciousness, he leans on the shoulder of a young white woman for support. Paranoid and unfeeling, the woman mistakes his gesture for a sexual pass and shoves him away. It is also a white prostitute

who instigates the betrayal of Jules that results in his being shot; she persuades a dark prostitute who has befriended Jules, letting him hide from his pursuers in her apartment, to reveal his location to the thugs seeking him. The futility and frustration in the relationship between contemporary Western men and women is summed up in a powerful visual gesture: tired, taking refuge in a friend's apartment, Jules lies down fully clothed next to his friend's white companion and burrows his head—still shielded in his motorcycle helmet —into the irritated woman's shoulder; she then punches his helmet away. Completely protected and without a trace of vulnerability, Jules is impervious to her. It is also important to notice that in the film none of the white women, including the policewoman who is on the screen more than any other white female, plays an important role in the unfolding of the story and all of them are low in the hierarchy of characters in the film.

In telling contrast to the white woman, who is cold and distant, the dark woman is depicted as warm, loving, resourceful and above all in emotional and sexual synchrony with man. She is the epitome of ideal womanhood that Jules and Gorodish find vanished in their own culture but are striving to retrieve and reestablish as the norm.

One embodiment of this ideal is Cynthia—the dark goddess whose beauty, quiet but powerful sexuality and sheltering strength must be preserved and protected at all costs. She is Jules's "private property," "his Diva," and must remain his and only his; Jules's arduous efforts to keep the tape of her voice out of the hands of the Taiwanese record pirates is an enactment of his refusal to share her with the public. The owning of her (voice) is, of course, very significantly based not on any "right" but on a "theft": Jules's taping of her voice without her consent or even knowledge. Having "stolen" her voice, Jules, like all colonialists, acquires the right of ownership, and throughout the film he behaves as if he does indeed have a legitimate claim on her voice. As Cynthia reminds him, the illegal taping is nothing short of a rape. However, Cynthia is presented in the film as the forgiving mother-mistress: unlike the blonde policewoman, Paula, who searches Jules's apartment for evidence of wrong-doing that could lead to his punishment, Cynthia, who has the evidence of Jules's wrong-doing, not only does not punish him but embraces him, and the film ends with Jules in her arms reaffirming his sense of true womanhood. The *naturalness* and organicity of such a relationship between man and woman is emphasized by the elaborate camera shots of Jules's "romantic" walk with Cynthia, resplendent in a flowing gown and carrying a white parasol, through the Tuileries Gardens where the two are shown in silent communion with each other and nature. Such "romantic" acts as Jules's bringing Cynthia an enormous bouquet of flowers and his fascination with lyrical music are in stark contrast to Jules's own contemporary urban language and lifestyle symbolized by his apartment: a virtual storehouse of recent electronic technology located on the top floor of a garage, packed with discarded machinery and vehicles, and decorated with large wall murals of fifties automobiles. Jules's "romantic" gestures thus point to his deep seated nostalgia for recapturing a lost world and its codes and modes of living.

The latent sexual dimension of Jules's relationship with Cynthia is alluded to when the camera cuts from the scenes of their walk to a close-up of Jules the following morning lying under blue satin sheets in Cynthia's room. As the camera pans the room, it turns out he is sleeping alone on the couch, but in an earlier scene he acts out his sexual desires for "his Diva" using a dark prostitute as a stand-in.

Alba is to Gorodish what Cynthia is to Jules: nurturing, loving and ethereal. Her movements around Gorodish, for the most part, occur on roller-skates that keep her skimming above the floor and beyond the hard resistance of earth. Her manners and speech are also displaced—she is a woman-child symbolizing an everlasting childhood. Her language is charged with fables, jokes, stories and verbal gestures that pressure the banality of daily talk toward the poetry of the street. If Cynthia is, in Jules's words, the "Queen of the Night," calm, restful, mysterious, then Alba, whose name means "dawn," is the angel of the day bringing with her freshness, movement and openness. She is in tune with higher realities, and not only her talk and carefree gestures point to a "beyond," but her saluting the sun

with her bare breasts while taking care of Jules in the lighthouse is a central visual image reminding the audience of the lyrical space in which Jules's and Gorodish's search is taking place. She is uninhibited and uninhibiting: she shoplifts an album from a record shop, hiding it in a portfolio full of nude photos she has made of herself, as if to signal her disregard for such material codes as private property and such moral ones as propriety. The irony of this gesture and the contradictions upon which this notion of freedom is based are revealed when one realizes that she herself is a piece of private property owned by Gorodish and subject to his own sense of propriety as when he jealously chides her for coming in late, threatening to put her back where he found her—on a road in Vietnam with her VC friends—if she does it again.

The women of the film are thus separated along a color line with white representing lifelessness, lack of romanticism and a deadly indifference to emotions and dark symbolizing life-giving energies, warmth and protectiveness. The white women are all unaware of the inner needs of the men around them while the dark women center their lives around the desires of men and are thus shaped by men according to their needs. The film carefully points out that the emotional and erotic power of the dark woman is not just a question of relative personal perception but a universally perceived fact. One way in which the film signals this universality is to permeate those environments encompassing the harmony of white men and dark women with blue lighting (or blue objects). (Even when Jules is with the prostitute, the film plays with the color of the lighting: harsh colors shattering the calm dark light symbolize her failure.) Even more important, the film attempts to show how this notion transcends the particular by studying the relationship between dark women and white men from two entirely different perspectives: the view of Gorodish and that of Jules.

Gorodish is the intellectual who is involved in the discovery of the underlying structures of reality. In fact it is through his analytical powers that he sees the connections between events (including the two conspiracies behind the two chases) and by manipulating the relationship between the two manages to achieve his goals and arrange the deaths of all the bad guys: not only the chief of police and his henchmen but also the Taiwanese record pirates. He is a frightening new, postmodern combination of intellectual-technocrat-guru whose voracious, imperial "I" does not recognize any boundaries. He is equipped with the latest electronic and technological devices and gadgets and at the same time maintains a nostalgic reification for earlier industrial products such as his fleet of 2 CV Citroëns and the lighthouse itself. He obviously has the resources to indulge his taste for both state-of-the-art and "antique" technologies as well as spend entire days meditating on puzzles and cultivating the Zen art of buttering bread. The source of his income (and thus his freedom to meditate) is not quite clear, although his understanding of the criminal mind and ability to anticipate and control the actions (even arrange the deaths) of the various felons, suggests his own involvement in underground activities. The world is a mere projection of his wishes and desires; he molds events almost according to his whims. Jules, on the other hand, is the intuitive man who delights in the sensuous. Although he is unanalytical, he also is a manipulator of events and people and like Gorodish in order to satisfy his desires does not stop at any boundaries.

Both men are living on the margins of contemporary life, but this does not mean that they are marginal. They are located, in fact, at the heart of the contemporary world. They have a postmodern lifestyle, are conversant with technology and are at home with the many languages and codes of modern living. Similar to other colonialists, they keep abreast of the technological developments of their time and simultaneously are nostalgic for earlier developments and traditions. They are romantics with a high degree of self-reflexivity about their own acts and beliefs; their talks and discussions constantly include themselves. For Gorodish this self-reflexivity is analytical —there is hardly a moment in which the subject of his thinking is not thinking itself— while for Jules it is primarily intuitive and phenomenological—a way of feeling and acting. However, for both such a high degree of self-consciousness does not preclude a rather twisted naïveté, which they seem to welcome as a relief from the oppressiveness of

constant self-examination.

Although unknown to each other at the start of the film, once introduced by Alba, Gorodish and Jules recognize their shared affinity and act as if they have long been intimate. They are in fact the two complementary sides of the European mind. While one represents the analytical and the other the intuitive, they are both the film's heroes—the forces of good resisting the forces of evil—and are united with the dark women who are also representative of art, innocence and self-knowing. The world of the film is thus divided between the good (Western men and dark women) and the evil or ignorant (the chief of police, his cohorts, the Taiwanese record pirates and a number of white women who are all too busy surviving to be aware of the higher realities of living). The world around the criminals and white women is one of corruption, prostitution, self-interest and unthoughtful living, but the world around Jules and Gorodish is one of purposeful living and aesthetic and erotic purity. The moral purity in the film is presented through the use of such visual clichés as the two henchmen. The brutality and vulgarity of one is communicated by drawing on the negative racial and cultural stereotypes of a Spaniard in French culture. The other henchman is presented in terms of the international imagery of punk; not only do his clothes, manner and weapon (an ice pick) signal his criminality, but, even more important in terms of the film, his aesthetic anarchism is a sign that he is the emissary of disorder. He hates everything from Beethoven to elevators, preferring only to listen to kitschy accordion music through his earphone. The world of the film is so unequivocally polarized and Jules and Gorodish are so unquestionably presented as angels of goodness that Gorodish's arrival in one of the last scenes of the film (in which the chief of police is about to murder Jules and the policewoman) is cheered by the audience as if John Wayne had suddenly come to the rescue and vanquished the bad guys.

But the film's association of Jules-Gorodish with the forces of good breaks down under its own inner contradictions which deconstruct the philosophical ground of the film: Jules-Gorodish, far from being uncontaminated goodness, partake in the same crimes for which the chief of police is doomed. In order for Jules and Gorodish to obtain a fulfilling relationship, which for them is the main purpose of life, they find themselves taking those very qualities away from others. Gorodish steals Alba from Indochina. Jules steals Cynthia's voice and dress, not only causing her agony but also forcing her into an abhorrent situation that threatens to destroy her integrity, identity and art. The target of these acts of violence are dark women who are vulnerable in the white world. Gorodish and Jules exploit this vulnerability in the same fashion the chief of police exploits prostitutes and drug addicts, and in the same tradition that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colonialists exploited the third world. In the film the dark woman replaces the Western woman, who has in the last decade or so moved away from this position of total vulnerability to the Western man's oppressive desires, as the site where aggression is unleashed. The film legitimizes this aggression by presenting Jules and Gorodish as on the side of goodness, poise, sensitivity and aesthetic harmony. Their acts of self-fulfillment, however, are based on the same principles as those of the criminals: exploitation of others. The polarization of good and bad in the film thus collapses under the weight of its own arbitrariness. The film's seeming coherence is achieved through love, but the coherence is based on an incoherence—a violation of its professed values and its founding ideas. This situation is itself an extension of a larger historical change: the current confusion in the relation between men and women in the West masked by the seeming order of an imported love.

The subject of the film turns out to be the transgressions committed against those whose victimization is necessary for the heroes to reach the desired level of self-fulfillment and happiness. That dark women are the objects of aggression is a telling indication of the changing geoerotics of the times: the colonialization of women may come to an end in one part of the world but the domination of the imperialist male continues in other corners of the globe. The emotional expansionism of the white male, however, is legitimized in the language of flight from the emotionally dead white woman and embrace of the resurrecting dark female. —MAS'UD ZAVARZADEH

Books

FIGURES OF DESIRE

A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film

By Linda Williams. University of Illinois Press, 1981. $21.50

In contrast to J. H. Matthews's *Surrealism and Film* (1971) and Michael Gould's *Surrealism and the Cinema* (1976), Williams's book is narrowly focused. Williams has argued that the "expansive tendency" of Surrealist film studies reached an "absurd culmination" in Gould's book, which included film-makers as diverse as Walt Disney and Michael Snow under the rubric of Surrealism. She praises Stephen Kovacs's *From Enchantment to Rage, the Story of Surrealist Cinema* (1980) insofar as it is a healthy corrective to these expansive tendencies.[1] However, Williams's scope, unlike that of Kovacs, is not historically limited. Most of her book focuses on four films, each by Luis Buñuel, certainly the most important film-maker to emerge from the original Surrealist group. She begins with his first films, *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) and *L'Age d'or* (1930), and then leaps forward to treat his most recent films, *The Phantom of Liberty* (1974) and *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977). An initial chapter identifies the theoretical underpinnings of Surrealist film, as derived from early manifestoes, essays, and unproduced scripts. Apart from this, Williams makes little attempt to place the films within the historical context of the Surrealist movement. Rather her book is, as its title states, theoretically oriented. She has studied under Christian Metz and, as Metz is in his recent work,[2] Williams is heavily influenced by Jacques Lacan. Most significant for her analyses are the Lacanian correspondences between the literary devices of metaphor and metonymy and the unconscious "rhetorial" devices of condensation and displacement, described by Freud.

Williams offers the novel thesis that the Surrealists loved film not because it afforded a means of creating enchanting illusions—the common assumption—but because it provided a means of *exposing* the illusions of the unconscious. In Lacanian terms what she suggests is that Surrealist film does not, as does commercial or "classic" cinema, attempt to exploit and manipulate its audience by confirming its "Imaginary" misrecognition, but attempts to bare those illusions and thus help release the viewer from Imaginary entrapment.

The discussion in film theory of the relationship between the film experience, especially that of classical film, and Lacan's "mirror-stage" is now over a decade old, one spin-off of the French reevaluation of Freud which came in the wake of the events of May 1968. Film styles and techniques which counter this tendency are, from this perspective, highly valued. Williams implies that Surrealist film should be included among those radical film styles which reveal illusion rather than lock its audience into illusion.

Her position may be forced at times. She argues that such incidents as the exit of the woman from the apartment directly onto the beach in *Un Chien Andalou* serve to interrupt Imaginary expectations and reveal their illusory nature. But such details can as easily be taken as support for the other, less sophisticated position: they can be seen as evidence of the Surrealists' love of fantastic, dream-like effects, so different from waking reality.

Williams also argues that "disturbed" relationships between figure and diegesis similarly tend to lay bare illusion. In the conventional relationship, figure *follows* a significant event in the narrative. A "contiguous background element . . . is brought momentarily to the foreground as a comment upon the dominant narrative action . . ." (p. 69). In Surrealist film this pattern is reversed. The figure *precedes* and seems to control the action. In the prologue metaphor of *Chien* the major event, the slicing of the eye, *follows* (according to Williams) the visual metaphor, the thin cloud passing in front of the round moon. Thus, figure "comes first and appears to generate the diegesis . . ." (pp. 71–72). However, based on the twelve stills from the prologue which Williams has herself reproduced (pp. 66–67), this structure is not so clear. The metaphor neither precedes nor follows the action but is framed within it. It occurs relatively late within the sequence of shots leading to the major event, and the action of the earlier shots hints at some final shocking event at least as much as their metaphoric aspects visually suggest that event.

I have another objection to Williams's

book. She is terribly inclined to use the word "shows"—in the sense of "demonstrates"—when referring to conclusions of Metz and Lacan. One gets the impression that a "QED" should follow Metzian and Lacanian proclamations, as if they have been demonstrated as unquestionably correct. In fact they are aspects of a psychoanalytic theory and an attempt to apply that theory to film. Certainly the argument that the Lacanian approach is appropriate in treating Surrealist film in particular is strengthened by the fact that Lacan himself, early in his career, was influenced by Surrealism. Nevertheless, one wishes that Williams had expressed herself in a somewhat more qualified manner. Sherry Turkle, in her book on the French infatuation with psychoanalysis since May of 1968, wisely (and refreshingly) speaks of the Lacanian "paradigm," using Thomas Kuhn's expression.[3]

These criticisms are directed against some of the flashier aspects of Williams's thesis and are not intended to detract from the real value of her book, which contains some of the closest and most persuasive readings of Surrealist films ever written. Identifying and clarifying metaphoric and metonymic relationships within the films does prove to be an extremely fruitful means of uncovering their psychoanalytic and political themes. In *Un Chien Andalou* she identifies two classes of image relationships: metaphoric relations of cutting and mutilation, which relate to castration anxiety, and metonymic relations of fetishistic, "feminine" frills and garments, which signify the attempt to disavow castration.

Williams sees violence as the central theme of *L'Age d'or,* violence evolving throughout the film's five sections, which represent a progression from a natural state, through the founding and elaboration of civilization, and finally to its decadence. Violence at first results from "natural" territorial battles, but in the final section, which conflates the image of Christ with that of a character from de Sade, it has become a substitute for sex. Each section is a relatively independent diegesis, in metaphoric relation to the other sections.

The *Phantom of Liberty* is even more discontinuous in its narration, even though it contains few abrupt leaps in time or space. The camera, as if in parody of classical narrative conventions, abandons incomplete stories, typically to follow a minor character into a new story which is also subsequently to be abandoned. Nevertheless, among the various incomplete stories similar incidents, images, phrases, and themes recur. These metaphoric relations, rather than narrative continuity, clarify the meaning of the film. One of these recurrences is the theme of the love object which is "infinitely desirable" because it is "ultimately elusive" (p. 174). Thus, the significance of the cry, "Vivan las cadenas!" ("Long live chains!"), which is heard in the beginning and at the end of the film.

In *That Obscure Object of Desire* Matthieu's desire for Concha (played alternately by two actresses) similarly represents a desire whose intensity is proportional to the unattainability of its object. Throughout the film Matthieu's "phallic quest" is interrupted by various barriers—a chastity belt, the bars of a gate, or, metaphorically, the noise of a train whistle which drowns out the story he tells. The voyeuristic aspect of Matthieu's desire is the very condition of its existence. It is crucial that the object of desire be *Imaginary* in the Lacanian sense; it is imaginary in that it is bound up with an *image* and imaginary in the sense that it is *misconceived*—an impossible unity is imagined possible. Matthieu's desire "structurally repeats the mirror-stage apprehension of a mistaken unity of self and Other in the imaginary lure of the reflected image" (p. 196).

Williams does a persuasive job of explaining the difficult final metaphor of the film, the woman seated in the shop window mending a hole in a bloodied gown. If the gown is regarded as a fetish object, with its attempted disavowal of castration, the hole in the gown is a "disavowal of a disavowal, the insidious reassertion of the lack or wound in the very fabric of the material which attempts to cover that lack" (p. 204). In the centrality of the castration theme, *That Obscure Object* is similar to *Chien,* made nearly fifty years earlier. Stills Williams has reproduced demonstrate the striking similarity between the shot of the woman mending the gown and that of the reproduction of Vermeer's *The Lacemaker* from *Chien.* Mending the hole is an attempt to "suture" the assertive absence. However, the threads "can never be totally joined. For lace can only partially veil the flesh beneath. Lacemaking is thus the permanent inscription of absence and lack in the very act of joining together threads of an imperfect suture" (p.

208). This is, indeed, High Lacanese. However, the elegance of the explanation, along with the persuasive relating of themes and imagery of the two films widely separated in time, are enough to make one wonder if there may not be something to it after all.

—SILVIO GAGGI

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1. See her review of Kovacs, *Film Quarterly,* Summer 1981, p. 41.
2. "The Imaginary Signifier," trans. Ben Brewster, *Screen,* XVI, 2 (1975), pp. 7-76.
3. Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics, Freud's French Revolution* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), p. 47, and Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

Controversy & Correspondence

The Origin of Ideas: A Reply to Fabrice Ziolkowski by Bill Nichols

Where do correct ideas come from, Chairman Mao once asked. For Fabrice Ziolkowski the answer is simple: Paris. Raymond Bellour in particular. This prompts him to chastize me for failing to confirm this view in *Ideology and the Image.* Years ago, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith disputed Charles Eckert's perception of a "school" of English cine-structuralists (*Screen* 14:3) as an oversimplification and a misperception regarding the dissemination of ideas and the influence of Lévi-Strauss in particular. Eckert's telescopic view strikes me as analogous to Ziolkowski's tunnelvision, though less naught: Eckert at least doesn't invoke "an Oedipal struggle between son and father" to explain away differences in point of view. The real struggle, I suspect, involves an understanding of the complex origin of ideas, most particularly in relation to the matrices of purpose that inevitably accompany them.

Ziolkowski devotes a good deal of his review of *Ideology and the Image* to a discussion of Raymond Bellour's publications. This leads him to conclude with a set of questions: "The question which began this review then returns, who is the book for? If it is destined for a public basically unfamiliar with theoretical writings in film, must this historical perspective be eradicated from the book? If it is destined for film scholars, is this then a veiled strategic move?" (Ziolkowski had an opportunity to ask me these questions personally but inexplicably chose not to.) Since Ziolkowski leaves his queries unanswered it seems appropriate to provide a response:

(1) The book is meant for readers interested in the relationship of ideology to systems of visual signification. Although Ziolkowski suggests different categories of readers, he never mentions the most central category of all—those curious and troubled enough about the ideological dimension of visual signification to want to understand and change it, regardless of their status within the academy. This choice of audience should be evident from the tone, content and level of argument throughout the book. The complete lack of discussion of the political perspective of the book, though, is the most obviously "structuring" absence in the review. Since that perspective has also guided my use of the thoughts and ideas of others, it is not too surprising that Ziolkowski can only ask questions of the book's relation to the work of others: the tradition and perspective informing the book eludes him.

(2) I do not assume the "public" is unfamiliar with the issues developed in theoretical writings. Far from it. My assumption is that the most crucial theoretical explorations are not unlike myth: they seek to understand and at least formally resolve contradictions, dilemmas, paradoxes which most of us experience in a more visceral form. Far from eradicating such work, I have striven to build upon it. (I am not sure one can say Bellour has also done so simply by noting he has published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* which absorbed a Marxist influence in the sixties, as Ziolkowski does.) My goal has been to increase the applicability and accessibility of theory to lived experience (that zone so densely permeated by ideology). Not only do I owe a debt to many theorists—some of whom, like Bellour, are unacknowledged absences but far more structuring to my thought than he; for instance, Theodore Adorno, Martin Buber, Thomas Elsaesser, Brian Henderson, Russell Jacoby, Herbert Marcuse and Paul Tillich—but I have sought to animate and extend the very tradition of accounting for ideology within systems of representation Ziolkowski fears may be eradicated.

(3) My "move" (in leaving Bellour absent) must by definition be "veiled" once we accept Ziolowski's assumption that ideas are conceived in a political vacuum, disseminated by specific inventors from discrete places of origin and that their nominal content (e.g., *The Birds,* condensation and displacement) supercede their purpose or use-value. I neglected to mention Raymond Bellour (some of whose work is familiar to me) because it did not help me formulate the aesthetic/ideological perspective I was trying to develop. This may be an idiosyncratic judgment (I don't doubt that other Marxist theorists may find Bellour's work of value), but it is nonetheless the one that has guided me. Ziolkowski is surely aware that the politics of the formalist, psycho-semiotic approach adopted by Bellour and many others has been a subject of dispute (see *Jump Cut*'s debate with *Screen,* for example.) As my book makes clear, I see value in some aspects of this approach but I am afraid that Bellour has not been one of the writers who has helped me discover that value. (Heath, Wollen, Lesage, Mulvey, Johnston, Cook, Doane and De Lauretis are some who have.)

To repeat and elaborate on my comments in the

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Where do correct ideas come from, Chairman Mao once asked. For Fabrice Ziolkowski the answer is simple: Paris. Raymond Bellour in particular. This prompts him to chastize me for failing to confirm this view in *Ideology and the Image.* Years ago, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith disputed Charles Eckert's perception of a "school" of English cine-structuralists (*Screen* 14:3) as an oversimplification and a misperception regarding the dissemination of ideas and the influence of Lévi-Strauss in particular. Eckert's telescopic view strikes me as analogous to Ziolkowski's tunnelvision, though less naught: Eckert at least doesn't invoke "an Oedipal struggle between son and father" to explain away differences in point of view. The real struggle, I suspect, involves an understanding of the complex origin of ideas, most particularly in relation to the matrices of purpose that inevitably accompany them.

Ziolkowski devotes a good deal of his review of *Ideology and the Image* to a discussion of Raymond Bellour's publications. This leads him to conclude with a set of questions: "The question which began this review then returns, who is the book for? If it is destined for a public basically unfamiliar with theoretical writings in film, must this historical perspective be eradicated from the book? If it is destined for film scholars, is this then a veiled strategic move?" (Ziolkowski had an opportunity to ask me these questions personally but inexplicably chose not to.) Since Ziolkowski leaves his queries unanswered it seems appropriate to provide a response:

(1) The book is meant for readers interested in the relationship of ideology to systems of visual signification. Although Ziolkowski suggests different categories of readers, he never mentions the most central category of all—those curious and troubled enough about the ideological dimension of visual signification to want to understand and change it, regardless of their status within the academy. This choice of audience should be evident from the tone, content and level of argument throughout the book. The complete lack of discussion of the political perspective of the book, though, is the most obviously "structuring" absence in the review. Since that perspective has also guided my use of the thoughts and ideas of others, it is not too surprising that Ziolkowski can only ask questions of the book's relation to the work of others: the tradition and perspective informing the book eludes him.

(2) I do not assume the "public" is unfamiliar with the issues developed in theoretical writings. Far from it. My assumption is that the most crucial theoretical explorations are not unlike myth: they seek to understand and at least formally resolve contradictions, dilemmas, paradoxes which most of us experience in a more visceral form. Far from eradicating such work, I have striven to build upon it. (I am not sure one can say Bellour has also done so simply by noting he has published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* which absorbed a Marxist influence in the sixties, as Ziolkowski does.) My goal has been to increase the applicability and accessibility of theory to lived experience (that zone so densely permeated by ideology). Not only do I owe a debt to many theorists—some of whom, like Bellour, are unacknowledged absences but far more structuring to my thought than he; for instance, Theodore Adorno, Martin Buber, Thomas Elsaesser, Brian Henderson, Russell Jacoby, Herbert Marcuse and Paul Tillich—but I have sought to animate and extend the very tradition of accounting for ideology within systems of representation Ziolkowski fears may be eradicated.

(3) My "move" (in leaving Bellour absent) must by definition be "veiled" once we accept Ziolowski's assumption that ideas are conceived in a political vacuum, disseminated by specific inventors from discrete places of origin and that their nominal content (e.g., *The Birds,* condensation and displacement) supercede their purpose or use-value. I neglected to mention Raymond Bellour (some of whose work is familiar to me) because it did not help me formulate the aesthetic/ideological perspective I was trying to develop. This may be an idiosyncratic judgment (I don't doubt that other Marxist theorists may find Bellour's work of value), but it is nonetheless the one that has guided me. Ziolkowski is surely aware that the politics of the formalist, psycho-semiotic approach adopted by Bellour and many others has been a subject of dispute (see *Jump Cut*'s debate with *Screen,* for example.) As my book makes clear, I see value in some aspects of this approach but I am afraid that Bellour has not been one of the writers who has helped me discover that value. (Heath, Wollen, Lesage, Mulvey, Johnston, Cook, Doane and De Lauretis are some who have.)

To repeat and elaborate on my comments in the

Preface to the book, my application of condensation and displacement to film analysis actually owes its greatest debt to my reading of Freud himself and Arthur Koestler's *The Act of Creation,* not to any of the French theorists; my use and selection of frame enlargements owes its greatest debt to the challenges of giving large, first-year lectures and, further back, to my UCLA graduate colleagues, particularly Janey Place, not to any French theorists. Overlaps with Bellour do not indicate a deeper, veiled debt but points at which two theoretical perspectives coincide despite differences in assumptions and purpose. I make no claim for being first; instead I want to stress that ideas often arise at many places in a given historical moment and take on different inflections depending on the context: we may be exposed to an idea several times before it sticks. And when it does stick, it is usually because it now fits within the larger patterns of perception and purpose we sustain for ourselves. Bellour obviously merits a place in Ziolkowski's pantheon; mine is populated by other figures.

These are a few answers to Ziolkowski's questions. In these days of proliferating knowledge, one should perhaps be grateful for any review at all. Even so, I continue to hope for a review that examines the book I did write rather than a possible version of one I did not. —BILL NICHOLS

What's Wrong With This Picture:

A Reply to Bill Nichols by Fabrice Ziolkowski

The new Chinese constitution adopted in December of last year barely mentions Mao Zedong in its 175 articles. Were the Great Helmsman with us today, he might ask: how do correct ideas vanish into thin air? The answer would unequivocally have something to do with history and historical record.

Bill Nichols's reply to the review of his book centers largely on the question of influence, whether my "pantheon" is better than his. . . . Why, Nichols asks, should he have mentioned Raymond Bellour in *Ideology and the Image* when the French theoretician's work did not influence him?

It will be apparent to those who read the original assessment of *Ideology and the Image* that Nichols has displaced my partial objection to the book and created an argument where none existed. The point is not whether "correct" ideas come from Paris, but the indisputable fact that certain ideas about film theory *do* come from there. A close reading of the review will show that Bellour's work was never treated as better than Nichols's. The issue raised was of a quite different order.

The question here centers on the use of scholarly citation within a continuity of argument in the field of film studies. Can historians, critics and theoreticians engaged in academic writing in this field choose to omit the citation of a work (article) which shares object and methodology with theirs simply on the grounds that they were not directly influenced by its author? Can an area of study as young as film scholarship, involved as it is in construction of a discipline, afford to turn its back on the historical continuity of the arguments developed by its writers?

Nichols contends that theory has points in common with myth. Leaving aside other possible arguments against such a tenuous proposition, there is one point on which theory and myth are not on common ground, that of authorship. Lévi-Strauss emphasized the "authorless" nature of myth. Yet, no one can deny that certain theoretical concepts (while carrying with them an historical identity) are traceable to specific authors. Those concepts elaborated and exposed by Marx and Freud are specifically assignable to them in *Das Kapital* and in *The Interpretation of Dreams.* They are cited by scholars accordingly.

In an effort to explain his omission of Bellour, Nichols cites numerous writers who have influenced him and whom he neglected to mention in *Ideology and the Image.* The list (Adorno, Buber, Tillich, etc.) is impressive but includes only two film scholars (Elsaesser and Henderson). Furthermore, none of these writers have, to my knowledge, ever written a textual analysis of *The Birds* (while Bellour has). Another question is then, who *does* Nichols cite? If such disparate authors as Kenneth Burke, Jean Douchet and Italo Calvino can find their way into Nichols's bibliography, as well as a 1963 *FQ* review of *The Birds* by Ernest Callenbach, then certainly, Bellour's article needs citation.

I am indeed aware of the dispute surrounding the use of what Nichols terms the "formalist, psycho-semiotic approach" in the pages of *Jump Cut* and *Screen.* I am also aware that the participants in these discussions are clearly identifiable, that a scrupulous use of citation is the earmark of such debates, lest they lose their continuity. Nichols says he makes/made no claim to being first. Yet, once again, the question of audience (who is the book for?) becomes crucial. Through the suppression of Bellour's contribution (to the field, not to Nichols), a presumption of origination can be said to exist. How is the reader to know?

I have no wish to revive musty debates concerning the relative value of one's "pantheon," nor am I interested in the declamatory presentation of those inhabiting such an edifice. No one demanded, nor suggested, that Nichols build a monument to any other theoretician. In this case, a simple historical marker would have sufficed.

On two minor points. Nichols appears miffed and puzzled that I did not debate these issues with him in person when I "had a chance to." The review had been written and submitted before I had met Mr. Nichols.

While writers usually hope for 100% agreement from those who review their books, none actually expect it. The review of *Ideology and the Image* was generally favorable in tone and concluded with a call for a careful reading of the book. Mr. Nichols may not have found this evaluation to his complete satisfaction, yet it remains the only one I can offer.

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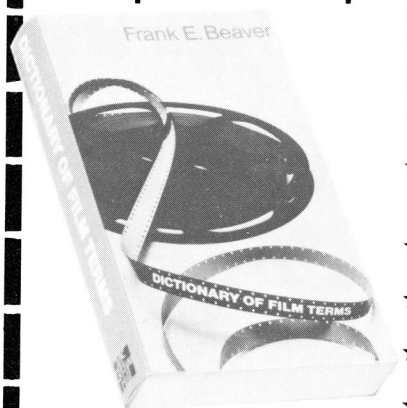

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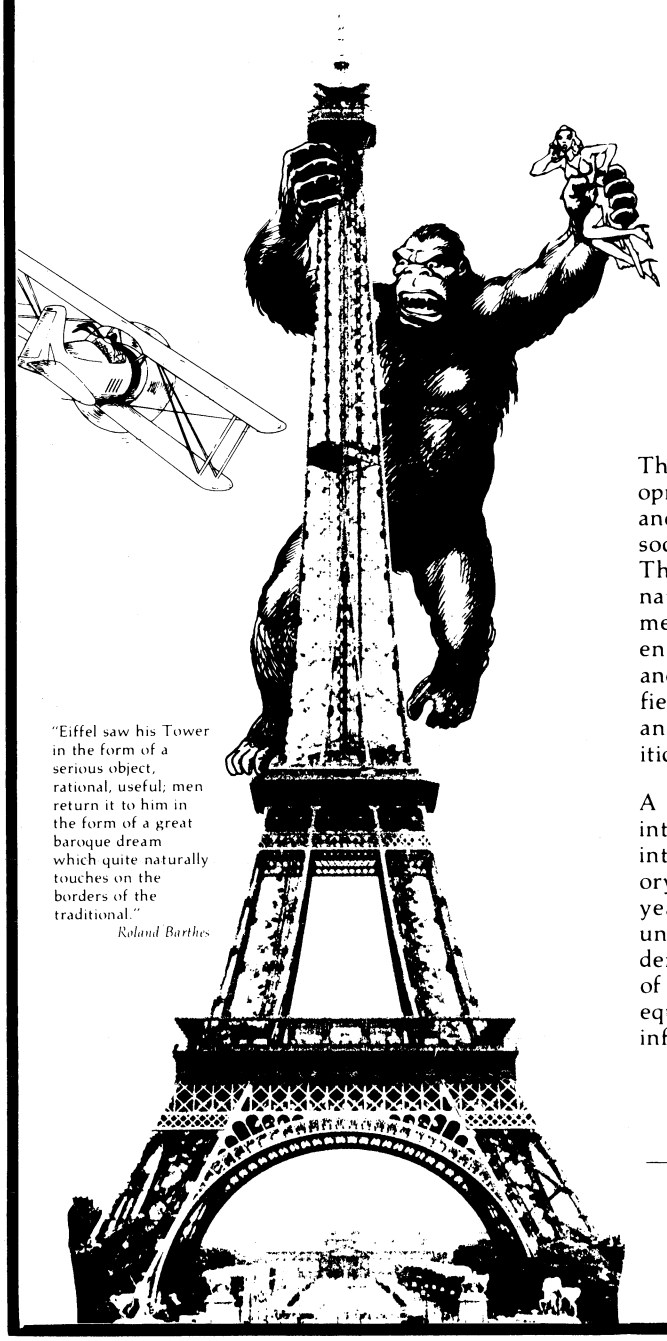

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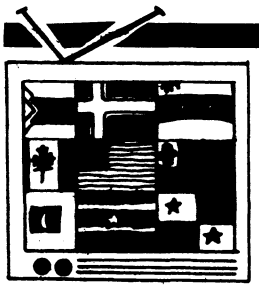

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